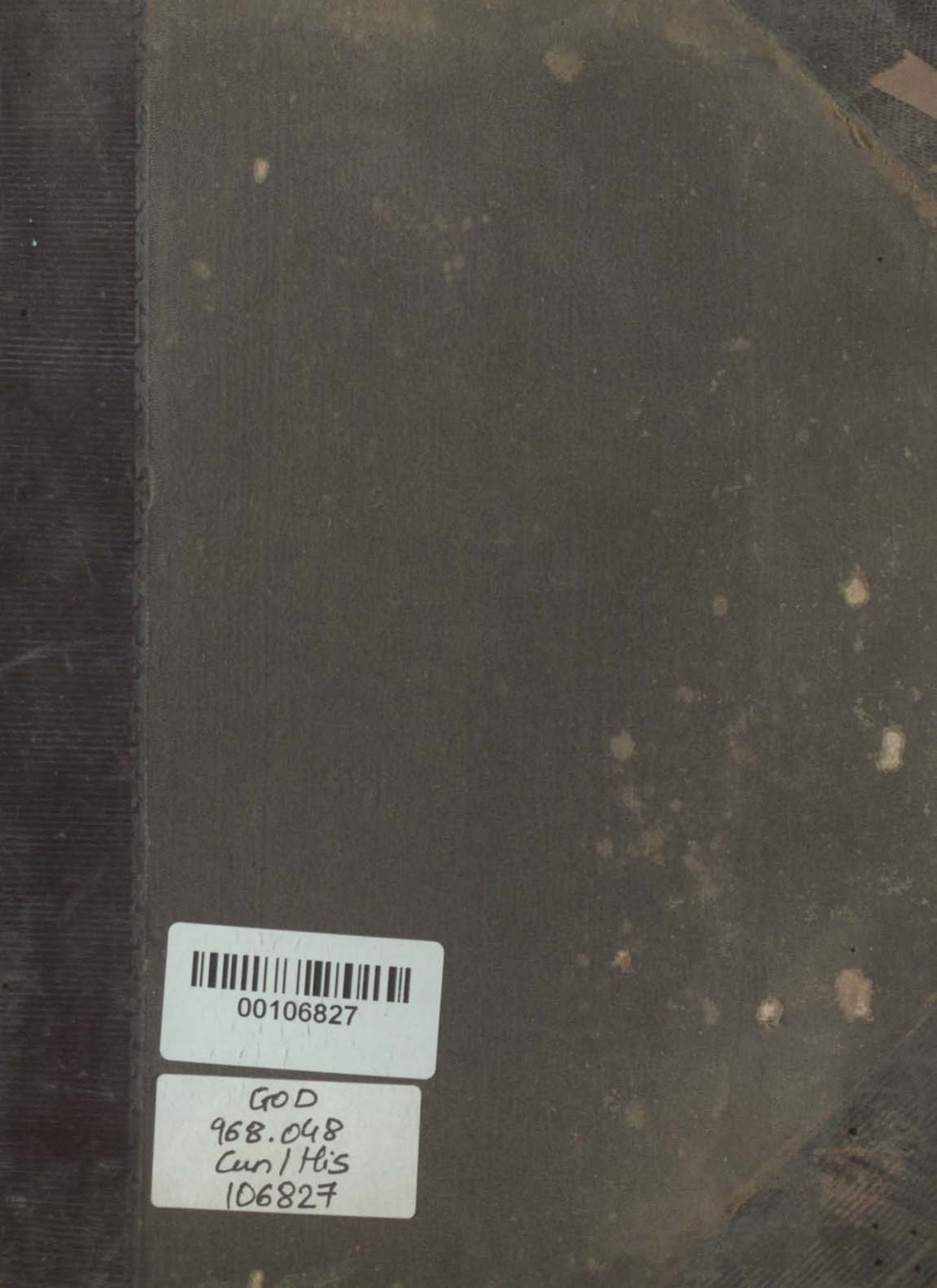
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THE HISTORY OF THE BOER WAR

THE HISTORY

OF

THE BOER WAR

BY

F. H. E. CUNLIFFE

FELLOW OF ALL SOULS' COLLEGE, OXFORD

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, AND PLANS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE TRANSVAAL	1
II.	THE BOER INITIATIVE AND THE BRITISH FORCES IN NATAL	21
III.	THE BATTLE OF TALANA HILL AND THE RETREAT OF YULE	37
IV.	ELANDSLAAGTE	61
V.	RIETFONTEIN	85
VI.	LOMBARD'S KOP	94
VII.	NICHOLSON'S NEK	112
VIII.	THE INVESTMENT OF LADYSMITH	122
IX.	THE ARMY CORPS—BULLER'S CHANGE OF PLAN	134
X.	METHUEN'S ADVANCE—BELMONT	160
XI.	GRASPAN	180
XII.	THE BATTLE OF MODDER RIVER	195
XIII.	THE BATTLE OF MAGERSFONTEIN	219
XIV.	STORMBERG	251
XV.	THE FIGHTING SOUTH OF THE TUGELA	280
XVI.	THE BATTLE OF COLENSO	310
XVII.	POTGIETER'S DRIFT	361
XVIII.	THE FIRST OPERATIONS OF WARREN	376
XIX.	SPION KOP	403
XX.	VAALKRANZ	441
XXI.	FOURTH ATTEMPT TO RELIEVE LADYSMITH—CAPTURE OF HLANGWANE AND MONTE CHRISTO	465
XXII.	THE FIGHTING AROUND COLENSO	482
XXIII.	THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH	505

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

The Boer Leaders, from a Photograph taken in 1886 3
General Joubert 9
The Summit of Majuba, looking North . . 13
Officers of the Johannesburg Boer Volunteer Corps (1895) 19
North Natal 23
A Group of Boers 27
The late Major-General Sir W. P. Symons, K.C.B. 33
Talana Hill (October 20, 1899) 40
Bringing up the Guns 43
General View from British Camp of Impate Mountain and Talana Hill . . . 45
The Battle of Talana Hill 47
General Lucas Meyer 49
Major-General J. H. Yule 52
The Waschbank, on the Line running from Glencoe to Ladysmith 54
General Yule's Column on the Road to Ladysmith 57
The Churchyard of Dundee where General Symons is buried 59
Van Reenen's Pass in the Drakensberg Mountains 63
General Sir George Stewart White, V.C., G.C.I.E., G.C.B., G.C.S.I. . . . 65
View of Elandslaagte 67
Elandslaagte, October 21, 1899 . . . 69
The Battle of Elandslaagte 71
Colonel Scott-Chisholme. (A Sketch from life taken three hours previous to his being killed.) 75
The Last Defender 77
General Koch 79
Colonel Schiel 80
The State Funeral of General Jan Koch at Pretoria, November 2 81
Commandant Pretorius outside the Boer Ward, Wynberg Hospital . . . 82
Boer Prisoners in Ladysmith Jail . . . 83
Ladysmith Camp, March, 1899 86
Rietfontein Farmhouse 87
The Battle of Rietfontein, October 24 . 88, 89
A Creusot Gun used against Ladysmith . . 95
General Panorama of the Battle of Lombard's Kop, October 30 . . . . . 96, 97
Boers Heliographing 99
The Battle of Lombard's Kop 101
Ladysmith, Lombard's Kop, and Nicholson's Nek 102
Sir George White and Staff Under Fire at Battle of Lombard's Kop . . . 105
Battle of Lombard's Kop 107
A 4·7 Gun on Temporary Platform . 108

PAGE

A Twelve-Pounder on Wheels 108
The Naval Brigade marching through Ladysmith 109
Mountain Artillery, a Mule Battery . . 113
Boer Scouts with one of the Mountain Guns Captured near Nicholson's Nek . . 115
Six Hundred British Prisoners Leaving the Station at Pretoria for the Racecourse, November 3, 1899 119
Ladysmith: General View of the British Outposts looking North 123
Bluejackets working the 4·7 Guns at Ladysmith 125
General French's Escape from Ladysmith: the Attack on the Train near Colenso . 127
Captain Orr, of the Imperial Light Horse . 128
The Town of Ladysmith 129
Umbulwana Hill 130
The Boers singing Psalms in their Camp on the Ladysmith Hills 131
A Group of Boers 133
General Rt. Hon. Sir Redvers Henry Buller, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.M.G., K.C.B. . . 135
The Army Corps: the new Howitzer Battery at Drill 137
The Army Corps: Artillery embarking at Southampton 139
Inoculating Troops for Typhoid Fever on board the *Roslin Castle* 141
The 2nd Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment leaving Portsdown 143
The Army Corps: Shipping Horses . . 145
Sir Redvers Buller's Arrival at Cape Town: the Drive to Government House . . 146
De Aar, showing the Railway to Kimberley . 147
Lieut.-General Sir F. W. E. Forestier-Walker, K.C.B. 150
Map of the Lines of Communication . . 151
The Army Corps: Steam Transport . . 155
Major-General Sir Francis Clery, K.C.B. . 157
Bethulie Bridge 161
Norval's Pont Bridge, near Colesberg . . 162
The Bridge over the Orange River below Hopetown (partially destroyed by the British) 162
Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen, C.B., C.M.G., K.C.V.O. 163
The Field Telephone: communicating with the Base from Belmont 165
The Advance of the "Dust Devil" . . . 168
Plan of the Battle of Belmont, November 23, 1899 170
The Battle of Belmont, November 23, 1899 . 171
Bluejackets of H.M.S. *Monarch* in Action . 173
The Verandah of the Officers' Hospital at Wynberg 175

PAGE

Wounded Boer Prisoners in the Hospital at Wynberg 177
The Boers' Method of dragging Guns up Kopjes 181
A Maxim Gun in Action 183
A Twelve-Pounder Naval Gun and its Company 185
Plan of the Battle of Graspan . . . 187
The Battle of Graspan, November 25, 1899 . 189
A Souvenir of the Battle of Graspan found in the Boer Camp 191
One touch of Nature makes the whole World Kin 193
The Modder River 197
The Bridge over the Modder destroyed by the Boers 198
View from the Modder River Railway Bridge looking East. The Riet is on the right . 199
A Boer Company ready to fire . . . 201
Fig. 1, The New Mauser Rifle; Fig. 2, Mauser Cartridges in loading strip; Fig. 3, The Martini-Henry loaded; Fig. 4, The Martini-Henry fired; Fig. 5, Martini-Henry Cartridge; Fig. 6, The Lee-Metford; Fig. 7, Dumdum Bullets, with and without slits; Fig. 8, Hollow-pointed Bullets 203
The Pompom Shell 204
The Pompom 205
The Battle of the Modder River—View of the Engagement as seen by the Grenadiers . 207
Plan of the Battle of Modder River, November 28, 1899 209
General Pole-Carew [on the right] in his Tent on the Modder 211
Cronje's Ambulance Waggons returning to take away the Wounded after the Fight of the Modder 214
After the Battle of Modder River. Cavalry watering their Horses 215
A Captive Balloon in the English Camp. . 217
General Piet Cronje 221
The Officers of the Black Watch . . . 224
Army Service Corps Waggon 225
The Battle of Magersfontein, December 10 and 11, 1899 227
Boer Wire Fence 500 yards from the Boer Trenches at Magersfontein . . . 228
Major-General Andrew G. Wauchope, C.B., C.M.G. 229
The Highland Brigade at Magersfontein . 231
Diagrams of the Boer disappearing Guns of Position used at Magersfontein with the Field Carriage designed to give them mobility 233
A Boer Trench at Magersfontein . . . 234
A Shot from "Joe Chamberlain." Firing the Naval 4·7 inch Gun at Magersfontein . 235
The Armoured Train at Magersfontein . . 237
General Wauchope's Grave at Magersfontein 239
A Naval Searchlight Flasher mounted on a Railway Truck 240
The Open Country at Magersfontein where the Highlanders suffered . . . 241
After Magersfontein 243
The Great Trench in which the Boers were Hidden at Magersfontein . . . 245

PAGE

A Piquet crossing the Pontoon Bridge over Modder River 247
Queenstown from Booker's Kop . . . 252
A Boer Commando entering Aliwal North . 253
Major-General Sir William Gatacre, K.C.B. . 255
Burghersdorp 256
Molteno, on the Stormberg (X), showing the Ridges in the Distance where Boers attacked General Gatacre's Forces . 257
A Fort at Bushman's Hoek: the Royal Irish breaking Camp previous to the Fight at Stormberg 259
The Stormberg Pass 261
The Boer Position at Stormberg which the Northumberland Fusiliers and Royal Irish Rifles tried to Storm . . . 264
The Night March 265
The Stormberg District viewed from the Summit of the Pass 267
The Donga where the Royal Irish Rifles were Captured 268
The British Retirement on Molteno . . 269
The Fight at Stormberg, Dec. 10th . . 270
The British Prisoners in the Hands of the Boers at Waterval 271
The Eyes of the Army: Scouts at Work . 273
One of the Gun Pits at Stormberg . . . 275
The Boer Laager at Stormberg . . . 277
The British Position at Colenso before the Evacuation 281
The Imperial Light Horse 282
Estcourt, overlooking the Little Bushman's River Bridge 283
In an Armoured Train 285
The Spot where the Armoured Train left the Rails 287
The Disaster to the Armoured Train . . 289
The Grave of those killed in the Armoured Train Disaster 290
A Protected Armoured Train 291
The Bridge over the Little Bushman's River. 292
Scenes on the Mooi River, Natal . . . 293
Preparing for the Boers: a Muster of the Town Guard at Pietermaritzburg . . 294
On the Maritzburg Railway near Estcourt . 295
The Battle of Willow Grange . . . 297
The Engagement at Willow Grange, Nov. 23, 1899 298
The Battle of Willow Grange. Doctors Operating under Difficulties . . . 299
The Boers blowing up a Bridge . . . 301
The Railway Bridge at Colenso . . . 303
A Sketch to Illustrate Joubert's Invasion of S. Natal and his subsequent Retreat . . 304
A Trench at Chieveley Camp 305
The Railway Bridge at Frere blown up by the Boers 306
The New Railway Bridge at Frere . . 307
Signalling to Ladysmith from Frere by a Searchlight mounted on a Train . . 309
Colenso and the Hills on the North of the Tugela 311
The Valley of the Tugela 313
Colenso 315
General Schalk Burger 316
The 4·7 Naval Gun in Action at Colenso . 317

PAGE

A Boer Laager at Colenso 318
A Drift on the River near Chieveley . . 319
The Road Bridge at Colenso 321
Panoramic View of the Battle of Colenso, December 15, 1899 323
The Battle of Colenso: the Attempt of the Dublin Fusiliers to Cross the Tugela . 325
A 75 Millimetre Creusot Quick-Firing Gun at Colenso 327
The Breech of the Creusot Gun . . . 328
Plan of the Creusot Gun in Action . . 329
Bird's-Eye View of the Battle of Colenso . 331
The Battle of Colenso, December 15, 1899 . 333
The Handy Man 335
The Battle of Colenso, December 15, 1899 . 336
The Last Two Gunners 337
Saving the Guns at Colenso 339
Winners of the Victoria Cross at Colenso . 341
The Grave of Lieutenant Roberts . . . 343
The Despatch of the English Guns captured by the Boers at Colenso 345
Men Sheltering in a Trench taken from the Boers 347
Sketch Plan of the Battlefield of Colenso, December 15, 1899 348–9
Boer Outposts 350
The Bluejackets of H.M.S. *Terrible* with their 4·7 Guns 351
The Breech (open) of a 6-in. (100-Pounder) Naval Gun 353
Some of the Guns captured by the Boers at Colenso in the Station Square, Pretoria . 355
After the Battle. The Irish Brigade . . 357
A Bundle of English Smokeless Cordite. Found near Ladysmith 359
Bringing Water to Chieveley Camp by Train 363
A Piece of Lyddite Shell from 5″ Howitzer. Found near Ladysmith 365
Mules with Ammunition Waggons crossing a Spruit 366
Map of the South Bank of the Tugela . . 367
Brigadier-General the Hon. Neville G. Lyttelton, C.B. 369
The Seizure of Potgieter's Drift . . . 371
The Military Telegraph Office at Potgieter's Drift 373
Passage of Infantry over a Bridge of Waggons 374
Lieut.-General Sir Charles Warren, G.C.M.G., K.C.B. 379
Rough Sketch of the North Bank of the Tugela showing Principal Roads and Hill Ranges 381
Spearman's Farm, looking West towards Acton Homes 383
Waggons Crossing Potgieter's Drift . . 385
The First Crossing of the Tugela by Lyttelton's Brigade at Potgieter's Drift on January 16 387
The Fifth Division Crossing the Tugela on the Waggon Drift Pontoon Bridge . . 389
A Map to Illustrate the Operations of Warren from Jan. 17th to Jan. 24th . . . 393
Bird's-Eye View of Sir Redvers Buller's Action on January 20 after Crossing the Tugela 395

PAGE

A Boer Commando marching through a Stream 399
General Woodgate 404
Spion Kop 405
General View of Field of Battle before Spion Kop from Gun Hill 408, 409
Lieutenant-Colonel Thorneycroft and Officers of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry . 411
Spion Kop: General Buller and Staff watching the Operations from Mount Alice . . 413
Dragging a Maxim up Spion Kop . . . 415
Storming of the Eastern Kopjes by the 3rd King's Royal Rifles 417
The Retreat over the Tugela after Spion Kop 423
The Devons crossing the Tugela . . . 427
General Louis Botha 431
Action on Spion Kop, January 24th . . 433
Bringing down the Wounded from Spion Kop 437
Combat at Vaalkranz 443
Summit of Vaalkranz 445
Getting the Naval Guns up Zwartkop . . 447
Gunners hauling up Ammunition for the Batteries on Zwartkop 449
Saving an Ammunition Waggon 453
Capture of Vaalkranz by Durham Light Infantry 455
Bird's-eye View of Vaalkranz Operations . 457
Naval Guns on Zwartkop 460
Sketch to Illustrate Operations on the Tugela 467
Panoramic View of the Country between Colenso and Ladysmith (apparently taken from the ridge of Monte Christo) . 468, 469
Hlangwane Hill 471
Outline Sketch of Monte Christo and Cingolo 473
Bridge of Sleepers taken up from the Main Line of the Natal Government Railways, thrown over the Tugela by the Boers . 475
The New Rail-Truck 6-inch Naval Gun . 477
Looking up the trench: the Mauser Ammunition was left by the Boers on Monte Christo 484
The Final Crossing of the Tugela . . . 487
A Sketch in the Boer Trenches at Fort Wylie 488
A 4·7 inch Naval Gun in Action against Grobler's Kloof 489
A Pontoon over the Tugela 491
Sections of Boer Trenches on Hlangwane . 492
General Fitzroy Hart 495
The Transport of the Wounded from the Field of Battle 499
Nearing Ladysmith, view from Longwood Farm 501
The 1st Lancashire Fusiliers waiting the order to advance 506
Sketch to illustrate the fighting around Colenso 507
The taking of Pieter's Hill by Kitchener's Brigade and the West Yorkshire Regiment 511
South African Light Horse passing through Ladysmith 515
General Buller entering Ladysmith . . 517
General Buller calling for Three Cheers for the Inhabitants of Ladysmith. . . 518
Meeting of Generals Buller and White in Ladysmith 519

THE HISTORY OF
THE BOER WAR

CHAPTER I

THE MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE TRANSVAAL

THE SUCCESSES OF THE BOERS—TO WHAT ATTRIBUTABLE—THEIR SYSTEM OF WAR MODELLED ON THAT OF THE KAFFIRS AND HOTTENTOTS; PECULIAR ADVANTAGES OF DUTCHMEN OVER NATIVES—NEW DEFENSIVE AND OFFENSIVE TACTICS—BOER MOBILITY—THE MILITARY STRUCTURE—DISCIPLINE—MOBILISATION—TRANSPORT—FOOD SUPPLY—ARTILLERY—ARSENAL—THE FREE STATE—ESTIMATE OF BOER STRENGTH—THE PRESENT GENERATION

THE war which began in 1899 between Great Britain and the Boer Republics was the outcome of causes which it is not the object of this book to discuss. It is enough to say that after long and unavailing negotiations the catastrophe was hastened by Mr. Kruger's ultimatum, and by the irruption of the Boer army into Natal. Before describing the operations of the subsequent campaign, it is necessary to consider the main points of the Boer military system, the initial advantages which our enemies possessed, and the state of our own preparations at the outbreak of hostilities. Of all the phenomena which have aroused the interest of soldiers during the past half-century, there have been none more startling than the sudden rise of the military power of the Transvaal. That a population of some 200,000[1] souls, for the most part devoid of regular military organisation, should have succeeded in baffling and defeating sixty or seventy thousand fine troops, devotedly led and eager to win, is a fact not altogether to be explained away by bad strategy, insufficient preparation, and unfavourable local

[1] This includes the Free State Dutch.

conditions. Brave as we knew the Boers to be, deadly marksmen as they had proved themselves at Majuba and Laing's Nek, few professional men, either in this country or on the Continent, thought them capable of conducting large operations. Nor can we safely attribute their success to foreign guidance. The ablest strategist will fail if his troops are deficient in martial instinct, in that kind of knowledge which, when gained in actual war, is called experience, but which can be kept alive in peace by a vigorously held tradition and by favouring conditions of country and habit of life. Assuredly the Boer has engrained in his nature an aptitude for war unsurpassed by any other people. Not without a large share of self-reliance, judgment, and, above all, inherited principles of action, could a nation of peasants, however courageous and skilled in the use of the rifle, have accomplished what the Boers accomplished in the first three months of the war. It is worth while, then, to glance briefly at their past history and at the origin and development of the system of warfare which they have so admirably turned to account.

It is hardly necessary to remark that military annals present no exact parallel to the Great Trek and to the subsequent struggles of the Dutch farmers. The exodus of a European people into a wilderness inhabited by tribes fiercer and more militant than the American Indians, the gradual conversion of the settlers to the native modes of warfare, and the final adoption of these to modern conditions, stands alone in recent times. In North America, where the conquest of the Indians by the whites warrants a comparison, the immigration neither took place so suddenly nor on so large a scale. The Red Man, too, lacked the headlong courage of the Zulu and the ceaseless perseverance and fortitude of the Hottentot. The brief and bloody raids along the Indian frontier rarely exhibited the same exterminating energy as the wars which the Boers, hemmed in on three sides, waged against Dingaan, the Basutos, the Matabele, and the other tribes whom the need of expansion or of self-defence impelled them to attack or resist.

The characteristics of Boer warfare early disclosed themselves. At first they seem to have clung to the protection of their laagers; but they soon saw the advantages of bolder methods, and learnt to meet

THE BOER LEADERS, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1886.

(*From "South Africa."*)

their cruel and subtle adversaries upon more than even terms. A recent German writer,[1] who has had especial occasion to study the question, thus summarises this newer development:—

"The Military History of South Africa shows that the conduct of war as practised by the Hottentots and Bushmen was gradually adopted by all new-comers, first by the Kaffirs, then by the Boers, and finally by the other whites, and that the change of armament, the transition from bow and arrow to spear and firearms, found scarcely anything to alter in their system of tactics. These tactics were borrowed entirely from the hunting experiences of the Hottentots."

While the same writer admits that this people borrowed something from the Boers, he seems to make it clear that the latter owed still more to the natives. The more unpleasant aspects of Boer fighting were plainly due to this source. The disregard and the open abuse of the formalities of European war by the rougher elements of the Transvaal army were but an illustration of the native principle that the enemy must be destroyed regardless of honour or mercy. The Hottentot, whose base was his laager, and who was influenced only by his anxiety for what it contained, held the annihilation of the opposing laager and its defenders to be the sole object for which war was waged. The conditions of civilised war are different, and for the most part our enemy has conformed to its formalities, but it is no injustice to the Boers to say that the more ignorant of them remained somewhat under the influence of the cruel and unscrupulous lessons which they had learned while raiding and being raided by the natives.

In matters of pure tactics, according to Von François, the Boer methods were a still closer imitation of those employed by the Hottentots. His remarks so admirably describe the offensive side of our enemy's system that we quote his paragraph *in extenso*:—

"When about to fight, the Hottentots separate themselves into detachments of from five to twenty men. The detachments approach the enemy in a thin line of skirmishers—each sharpshooter twenty

[1] "Kriegs führung in Süd Afrika," by Major C. v. François, commandant in German South-West Africa.

paces and more from the next—and making a most careful use of the ground, endeavour to outflank and to surround him. The bodies held in reserve are invariably used against the flanks of the enemy. This formation is taken up with the greatest rapidity. The detachments in rear execute their movements on horseback at full gallop. Characteristic of the formation are the immense frontages occupied by few men. As a result, losses are diminished, firing is easier, especially against an enemy who remains massed or is so weak that he allows himself to be surrounded. It further facilitates their withdrawal and retirement. Generally they look upon a body of European troops as a savage and very dangerous wild beast against which they must take up secure positions, and at which they must shoot very carefully from different sides, so that he may not know whence the shots come or against whom to turn. By brute force, says the Hottentot to himself, no success is attainable, but it is easily so by the use of wile and cunning."

The description of the Hottentot defensive was equally applicable to the Boers before they were allowed time to turn hills into forts. The exigencies of war caused changes in their offensive tactics also. Their assaults occasionally partook of a more desperate character, though their failure, however necessary from a general point of view they might have been, proves that the skirmish and the "surround" are better suited to an irregular system. The great and obvious weakness of the Boers as soldiers was their helplessness in front of strong and resolutely held positions.

In their own style of combat they were unsurpassed. The dominating qualities of the European had made their copy of native models infinitely more formidable than the original. To the craft, quickness, and patience of the savage they added the steady nerve, the unbending courage, and the religious fanaticism of the Huguenot.

"Fierce, poor, content, ungovernably bold"

were the early Transvaalers, and their descendants have inherited many of their sterner virtues. In the wild days of early settlement all had to learn the trade of war, and the lessons of that early training were

never forgotten. Confident in their shooting powers, mounted on horses as tough and wiry as themselves, and quick to utilise every advantage of ground—the Boers were probably still the finest light horse in the world. Effecting by shot more than regular cavalry achieve by lance and sword, more enduring than the disciplined squadrons of Europe, they could also hold a position with the cool obstinacy of veteran footmen in the face of the most appalling fire. Only when their opponents were near enough to use the bayonet were they forced to retreat. Then for the first time shock tactics came into play, and the irregulars, without the necessary cohesion, and unequipped for hand-to-hand fighting, yielded before the unwavering and irresistible rush of British infantry.

The degree of mobility shown by the Boers naturally varied greatly according to the operation of the moment. In sudden manœuvres over distances within the zone of immediate supply—by which we mean the limits to which horse and man may range without recourse to baggage-trains and other encumbrances—they possessed all the advantages of horsemen. But their transport was inadequate for long marches at a distance from their base, as was shown in the advance into Natal. Their movements under such conditions were no faster than, often not as fast as, those of a large body of regular infantry. Our own immobility in the earlier part of the struggle freed them from the necessity of swift and sustained marches in the presence of a strong and ready enemy.

The most remarkable and interesting personality among the leaders of the Boers was Commandant-General Joubert. The story that he was a native of Louisiana and fought in the American Civil War is incorrect. He was born in Cape Colony in 1831, and was a descendant of the Huguenots who fled to Holland. As a child of six he accompanied the farmers who first trekked over the Cape frontier. His people traversed the Karoo and the territory which is now the Orange Free State, and entered the then almost uninhabited country of Natal. The boy, upon whom this migration made a great impression, was seven years old when the heaviest disaster which had befallen the Boers took place—the massacre by the Zulus of Piet Retief's party of sixty-seven souls. A few months later, on December

16th (a date ever afterwards solemnly observed by the burghers as Dingaan's Day), the whites in a great battle totally destroyed Dingaan's army.

In 1847 the Jouberts moved from Natal into a region now part of the Transvaal. After serving on several commandos, young Joubert took part in 1852 in real fighting against Sechelé. The farmers, commanded by Field Cornet, now President Kruger, were victorious after a six hours' combat. In this year Joubert married. His wife, who accompanied him on all his campaigns, distinguished herself more than once in the fighting with the Kaffirs, and had a considerable influence on Joubert's political career. From 1853 to 1877 the future Commandant-General lived quietly on his farm, and was a kind of attorney, and afterwards a magistrate.

During the Presidency of Mr. Burgers Joubert was elected to the Chair of the Volksraad. As its head he had an interview with Sir T. Shepstone, in which he declined to support the proposed British annexation of the country. When the Union Jack was hoisted at Pretoria he refused an appointment from the Queen's representative. Afterwards when called upon to take the oath of allegiance he would not do so, and became a leader in the agitation for the withdrawal of the British sovereignty. Joubert left his country for the first time when he went to England in 1878 as a member of the second deputation which tried, unsuccessfully, to get the act of annexation annulled. The farmers refused to pay taxes to the British officials, and a great meeting was held at Paardekraal (where there is now a commemorative monument) at which Kruger, Pretorius, and Joubert were elected Triumvirs—the last named being also designated Commandant-General.

The first shots between the Republicans and the British troops were exchanged on December 16, 1880. The British reverses at Potchefstroom and Bronkhurst Spruit followed. At the latter place we had sixty-five killed and ninety-one wounded against seven Boer casualties. General Colley was next defeated at Laing's Nek (British loss, eighty-three killed, 111 wounded; Boer loss, fourteen killed and thirty wounded) and the Ingogo. On December 27th Majuba Hill was

GENERAL JOUBERT.

carried, the presence of the British on the eminence being first detected by Mrs. Joubert. The Boers, who numbered 154, had one killed and six wounded. Of the British force there were five officers, including General Colley, and eighty-six men killed, eight officers and 125 men wounded, and six officers and fifty-one men were taken prisoners. These figures are interesting as confirming to some extent the extraordinary skill with which the Boers evade heavy losses. The peace negotiations were now resumed and the Republic was recognised.

The year after Joubert was again in the field against a Kaffir chieftain. The wars against Malaboch and Magato came later. As a general, Joubert was famous for the care he took of his men and an avoidance of what has been called "military grand stand tactics." His cleverness procured him the nickname of "'Cute Piet." In May, 1883, he was elected Vice-President and Commandant-General, with Kruger as President, and they were re-elected in 1888, 1893, and 1898. Joubert stood against Kruger for the Presidency several times, and was credited with holding more Liberal views than "Oom Paul."

Though the organisation of the Burgher Army had been regulated and developed since the days when the old Vortrekkers set forth to find a promised land, its general characteristics at the beginning of the war were the same. The Republic primarily meant the subjection of the different bodies of emigrants to one government. The fighting men of each band of settlers used to assemble at the call of their leaders, going "on commando" when and where required. This commando system still survived, but according to the arrangement devised by General Joubert it had become territorial, the Transvaal being divided into seventeen districts, each of them supplying a commando varying in numbers and efficiency. The limits of each district and field cornetcy were settled by the higher authorities. Within them the Commandant and the Field Cornet were invested with large powers and responsibilities. All white men between sixteen and sixty years of age, and all dependable natives, were liable to service, the latter being employed as labourers, spies, runners, and team-drivers. The Commandant, chosen by the enfranchised burghers

of the district, held office for five years. He was intended to lead the commando in war, and preside over the affairs of the district in peace. The chief executive officer, however, was the Field Cornet. He carried out the mobilisation, served out arms, and kept the burgher-lists. He was elected by the burghers of the wards, and held office for the same time as the Commandant. In peace he assisted in the administration of justice and the execution of the laws. In war he bore the rank of captain, and commanded the men of his cornetcy. There were several cornets to each district, and they were supported by assistants in times of pressure. A system, under which the same officers discharged the duties of military commander and civil administrator, was obviously a form of military despotism. Lieutenants, sergeants, and corporals were elected after mobilisation, the latter being charged with such camp duties as were not performed by individuals, but no absolute rule can be laid down, as the whole organisation was in a high degree haphazard and irregular.

The principle of election, probably the best that could under the circumstances be devised, had at least a precedent in the armies of revolutionary France. Though incompatible with really strict discipline, it generally ensures the choice of a fairly capable man, and may result in the discovery of brilliant talent. It can hardly be said, however, that in the Boer army "la carrière était ouverte aux talents." Local prejudice, the limitations of birth, and frequent corruption, all of which appeared to hold a considerable place in the conservative Transvaal, were not generally favourable to upstart genius. It is difficult to speak definitely of the discipline. Certainly Mr. Rae's book, "Malaboch," does not give the idea of exact orders or prompt obedience. In one instance, in front of Mafeking, the Boer leader admitted that he could not control his men. But gross insubordination there could not have been. "There was very little discipline or method in the camp," wrote a *Times* correspondent of the Pretoria commando in October, "but plenty of willingness and a natural instinct for doing the right thing, which served very well in its place." This very fairly describes one side, perhaps the most important side, of the Boer soldier.

THE SUMMIT OF MAJUBA LOOKING NORTH.

The crest line is 250 yards beyond cemetery, where one officer (cross) and seventeen men were buried.

On the other hand, the general was probably very dependent upon public opinion. The burghers criticised loudly. Though ready enough to follow their leaders in action and to carry out his plans at the moment of crisis, any cessation of active operations gave opportunity for an expression of views, which could hardly fail to influence the judgment and will of the commander. While this failing did not diminish the fighting powers of the force, it might seriously affect the general plan. It is possible, for instance, that the wasteful attack upon Kimberley was undertaken in deference to popular hatred of Mr. Rhodes.

The Boer mobilisation was carried through with great rapidity. Mounted men rode round the farms warning the inmates, and the call was promptly answered. Horses were caught, rifles and ammunition collected, the waggon filled with a supply of food and other necessaries, and within an hour's time, perhaps even less, the males of the family were hastening to the rendezvous, sometimes accompanied by their women. The principle of commandeering private property was pushed to its logical extreme. Horses were taken out of the shafts, stores ransacked, and carts seized. The fighting man was allowed as much baggage as he chose. In old days every one was expected to furnish his own rifle and horse, and to bring a certain quantity of food, varying in proportion to the length and importance of the expedition. When his ammunition was exhausted the Boer would sometimes leave the front and go to buy more in the neighbouring towns. At the beginning of the present war, however, the ample provision of Mauser and Martini rifles and the other stores massed at Pretoria enabled the Government to supply a large part of the burghers with arms, ammunition, food, forage, mackintoshes, tents, and blankets. Of late years a regular cartridge allowance was issued at stated intervals, as Dr. Jameson knew. Such a plan is calculated to introduce uniformity of armament as well as sufficiency of ammunition, but a sum of money often takes the place of cartridges, the receiver buying the kind his rifle required. It is probable that all the burghers ended by using weapons recognised by the Government, private or purchasable supplies having soon been exhausted.

The miscellaneous collection of carts, horses, mules, and oxen

which accompanied a commando was not so unwieldy as might be supposed. Each man looked after his own beasts and baggage, and orders were carried out with fair punctuality and little straggling. A laager was about as mobile as an ordinary transport column. The Boers, like other nations more accustomed to the sun than to milestones, reckon distance by hours. As a rule the waggons followed at the interval of an hour's riding; that is to say, about six miles behind. Like the game they have gradually exterminated, the Boers travel furthest by night, forty miles without waggons being no uncommon distance. Usually the laager was very safely placed, its security being all-important. To irregular troops a general *point d'appui* is more necessary than to regulars. It helps to keep such a corps together, and its capture after a defeat probably entails the dispersion of its owners. The lack, too, of a second line of transport makes the loss of the domestic waggon much harder to replace. But the Boer's horse was yet more precious. Dismounted he was demobilised. His safe retreat was endangered and his offensive power destroyed.

Want of food was constantly reported to be troubling the Boers. There is no reason, however, to believe that this was really serious. The local knowledge and general resourcefulness of the farmer, the quantities of biltong with which he was furnished at home, and of which he could carry a good supply on his saddle, and the abundant crops of his still unwasted country, sufficed—especially when supplemented by requisitions—to keep him in the field. Mr. Kruger had plenty of foodstuffs at his disposal. The difficulty was to convey them regularly to the fighting line.

While a review of the military system of the Transvaal would be incomplete without a reference to the volunteers raised in the towns, these corps cannot be regarded as specially important in the history of the war. Their organisation was not indigenous, and though fairly efficient, they were in no way equal to the burghers. Their ranks included men of all nations and were formed largely of infantry, the shopkeeping element probably predominating. The Pretoria corps, for instance, had a strength of eight hundred infantry and two hundred cavalry. It served creditably in the Swazi campaign.

The greatest advance made by the Transvaal since the days of Majuba was its recognition of the scientific side of war. The discovery of gold and the consequent increase of wealth made possible a supply of war-material whose size and value we appreciated only too late. Pretoria was fortified, an arsenal founded, and enough mechanical plant collected for the casting of field guns, the repair of heavier pieces, and the manufacture of explosives. While the burghers still formed the real strength of the army, they had been stiffened by the introduction of a corps of artillery, organised upon foreign models and managed by foreign officers. Hopes were raised that, as in the case of the Mahrattas, the endeavour to conform to European ideas would cripple the efficiency of their light horsemen. The result was a totally contrary one. Their tactical mobility proved as remarkable as ever, and peculiar circumstances enabled them to use heavy guns as they were never employed before. How large the artillery force was at the beginning of the struggle cannot be stated with certainty. In June, 1899, the English Gvoernment was informed that the Transvaal Republic possessed sixteen 15-centimètre Creusot guns (6-inch "Long Toms"), twenty-one 37-millimètre automatic guns, nine 75-millimètres *plus* eleven more introduced in September, and four 4·7-inch howitzers—sixty-one pieces in all. Adding to these twelve 75-millimètre guns belonging to the Free State and eighteen of various antiquated patterns in the possession of the Transvaal in 1891, we have a total of ninety-one available in October, 1899. Later consignments arriving *viâ* Delagoa Bay probably raised this number to a far higher figure. Many reports were current regarding the *personnel* of this force. The higher officers, such as Albrecht and Schiel, were Germans; the rank and file a mixture of all nations. Boers were the nominal commanders, but all the technical work was done by the foreigners. When the campaign opened the new arm was not popular with the country burghers. The *Times* correspondent wrote that when the Pretoria commando was told off to escort the guns the disgust was great and general. Few probably regretted the innovation later. The foresight and boldness of the Transvaal Government was amply rewarded. Rarely in the course of a few years had a so-called pastoral people developed such fighting power.

In the Orange Free State, where the military system resembled in all essential points that of the Transvaal, the same massing of armament had long been in progress. A few years ago its artillery was far superior to that of its sister Republic, its officers being entirely Germans. The burghers themselves did not show the marked inferiority to their northern cousins as was so confidently predicted. Doubtless they were less immured to war at the commencement, but the rawness wore off, and in the fight they displayed throughout the stubborn qualities of their race in just as high a degree as the Transvaalers.

The most reliable estimate of the Boer armies we at present possess is that given out in Parliament, which was based on the reports of the Intelligence Department. It is as follows :—

June, 1899.	1. Transvaal.		
	Burghers liable to service ...	29,279	
	Trained Artillerymen	800	
	Police	1,500	
			31,579
	2. Orange Free State Burghers		22,314
			53,893
	3. Cape Colony Dutch, estimated at ...	4,000	
	4. Foreigners	4,000	
			8,000
	Total		61,893

The Government deducted from the total 2,000 Free State burghers as probably unfit to serve. The Cape Colony Dutch perhaps numbered many more than 4,000, but in any case estimates of 80,000 and 100,000 appear exaggerated. The enemy's mobility multiplied them in a most distracting fashion. We think ourselves justified in saying that at the outbreak of hostilities—that is to say, before the last reserves had reached the front and the influx of Cape rebels had become a serious factor—the troops immediately disposable did not exceed 45,000, of which probably 30,000 entered Natal.

Whatever the debt which the enemy owed to foreign generalship, the fact remains that the execution of plans was entrusted to the Boer leaders and their resolute followers. It was said before the war began

that the burgher had deteriorated. Only in so far as it referred to that new phenomenon in the Transvaal, the town-bred man, is this statement appreciably true. Obviously the storekeeper could not compare in either endurance, knowledge, or powers of riding and shooting with the countryman whose father, if not he himself, was bred up in the time of stress and danger, and whose life was passed in warfare and

OFFICERS OF THE JOHANNESBURG BOER VOLUNTEER CORPS (1895).
(*From "South Africa."*)

hunting. Of these older men, too, there were still many in the Boer ranks, the non-commissioned men, so to speak, who were the backbone of the whole. Some there were still who, like Joubert and Kruger, remembered the days of the Trek. The younger men were not less hardy than their fathers. They were still far enough removed from the enervating influences of civilisation, and their chief amusement was

rifle-shooting. In the Transvaal cartridges were sold in every store; a hundred were as welcome as a box of cigars in England. The demand for rifle ammunition was constant, and firing at marks may almost be said to have taken the place occupied by billiards in Europe. But there were stronger spurs to warlike prowess than love of the rifle. Every Boer had been reared under the dictates of a severe and narrow religion, whose outward expression is an intensified form of patriotism. He was taught to regard his race as a peculiar people, to hate and despise the Englishman, and to live in the remembrance of his own strange and triumphant history. His political ideal was assertion of the national superiority and independence, hopes which he had been taught to believe could best be realised by means of the old national weapon, a steady rifle and an active horse. So environed and prejudiced, it would have been wonderful if he had neglected to cultivate, even though with limited opportunities, the system and training which brought honour and victory to his fathers.

CHAPTER II

THE BOER INITIATIVE AND THE BRITISH FORCES IN NATAL

GENERAL ADVANTAGES OF THE BOERS—THE ALLIANCE WITH THE FREE STATE—THE OBJECTIVE OF THE BOERS, NATAL—IMPERIAL FORCES IN NATAL IN JULY AND AUGUST—SEPTEMBER—ALARM IN THE COLONY—THE BOER ATTACK DELAYED—DUNDEE—LADYSMITH—DISADVANTAGES OF THE BRITISH POSITION AT THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES

RELYING upon such men and such a system, the Republics offered battle to their giant adversary. Their plan was well laid, and despite the apparent hopelessness of their cause they had many points in their favour. Never was the weaker party more favoured by nature and by position. Sixteen days[1] of ocean travelling separated them from England. They were to fight on their own frontiers, and in country for the most part admirably suited to their methods of warfare. As far as their military mechanism would permit they were admirably prepared. They could count confidently upon drawing a large number of adherents from the territories of their enemy. The opposing forces were few and scattered, easily to be crushed, were but the attack sufficiently swift and vigorous. The whole force and freedom of the initiative lay in the hands of the Boers. They could choose their own moment and objective. They could safely count upon three weeks[2] elapsing before men and stores could be landed in Africa. In any case, thanks to the vigilant watch kept by their Government, we had no means of recovering those twenty days. If England armed, they could outpace her; if she held back, they could secure a yet longer lead.

[1] Sir R. Buller sailed on October 14th, and arrived at Cape Town on the 30th. His voyage was one of the quickest made.

[2] Thirteen days elapsed between the issuing of the order to mobilise, and the sailing of the first transport. The Boers took four days to collect their men and seven to bring up their stores.

The attitude of the Free State in the event of war had long been certain. Like the Transvaal, the sister Republic was armed to the teeth. Two months before the outbreak of hostilities, the burghers had been warned to hold themselves in readiness. President Steyn's protest against the movement of troops in Natal and his complaint that British troops had crossed the frontier near Kimberley can only be considered as a diplomatic removal of the mask. The pledge of mutual support could only have had one object. Any final hesitation that there may have been on the part of the Governments was but the nervous tremor that seizes upon men face to face with a crisis long expected and carefully prepared, but suddenly grown alarming by reason of its immediate approach.

Steyn's co-operation strengthened his ally to an extent far beyond the active assistance he could give. A large number of Free Staters would certainly have joined the Transvaalers, whether openly supported by their own Government or not. The State action of the Southern Republic placed Mr. Kruger in a position, should he so choose, to strike directly at the heart of the Cape. It doubled the strategical advantages in Northern Natal. It forced England to divide her troops to protect both her colonies, and it ensured a steady leakage of rebels across the Orange River. Had the Free State remained neutral, we might have thrown our whole active army, a mass of 50,000 men, into Natal. Had we, on the other hand, delivered our main attack from the west frontier, a course which the feeling in the Free State and the long line of railway would have rendered very awkward and embarrassing, we should at least have avoided scattering 20,000 men along the Orange River, while the movement of the Cape Dutch northwards would have been neither so great nor continuous as the actual presence of Boer troops caused it to become. That we were partly bound and partly driven to operate on two lines was due to the action of the Free State. It has been said that by bringing his own territory into the theatre of war Steyn uncovered Kruger's flank, and that the flatness of the Orange Free State was favourable to our troops. But for Kruger's initial purpose the time required for a movement of 500 miles from the Orange River, in face of a

REFERENCE
RAILWAYS
ROADS
HEIGHTS IN FEET
MISSION STATIONS
STATUTE MILES
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 20
TRANSVAAL
ORANGE FREE STATE
NATAL
CHARLESTOWN
LAINGS NEK
MAJUBA 7000
Mount Prospect
Inkwelo
INKWELOANA
Ingogo
SPITZ KOP
BOTHAS PASS
Quaggas Poort
VREDE
UTRECHT
Buffalo R.
Signal Hill
Krans Kop
NEWCASTLE
Drakensberg 6682
MULLERS PASS
Konigsberg
Tiger Kloof
BRIDGE
INGAGANE
Tentega Mt
Salt Lake
Small Lakes
Steil Drift
Cornelis R.
Verrekykers Kop
Wagenmakers Vley
Leo Kop
Normandien
Molen R.
Bluebank R.
DANNHAUSER
Imyayatwa Mt
SUNDAYS RIVER PASS
Rheebok Kop
Dwaal Spr.
Mlelanies Kop 7500
Sand Spruit
Impati Mt
Imputshini Mt
CUNDYCLEUGH PASS
MKUPE FORT
One Tree Hill
FORT
GLENCOE JUNCN 4303
CRAIGSIDE
DUNDEE
COAL FIELDS
Nelsons Kop
Plat Berg
DRAKENSBERG
Quaggas Mtn Pk
Rachitz
Biggars Berg 5861
BIGGARSBERG
FORT PINE
Hlatikulu
Indumeni 7200
DE BEERS PASS
Inhleke
Sundays R.
MERAN
Evansdale
HARRISMITH
Kleinfontein
Matawana's Kop
WASCHBANK
VAN REENENS PASS
Reversing Station
Albertina
Driefontein
BRIDGE
BEITH
Rensburg Kop
BRAKWAL
COLWORTH
Klip R.
JONONOS KOP
WESSELS NEK
Los Kop
Spion Kop
BESTERS
ELANDS LAAGTE
TINTWA PASS
Mt Tintwa 7500
WALKERS HOEK
Pepworth Hill
SUNDAYS RIVER
Indoda
Spandikron
BEZUIDENHOUT PASS
Sand Riv.
Sundays R.
DOUGLAS
BLAAUWBANK
LADYSMITH
O.F.S. JUNC
Hlenga or Jobs Kop
Isimbulwana Mt
FREERS ACTON HOMES
DEWDROP
Oanqana Mt
Pompelwana
Mpumpa
NELTHORPE
Umqwendu Mt
PIETERS
Spion Kop
Tugela R.
Onderbroek Hotel
ALLENHOLM M.S.
Umhlami
Shebas Breasts
BETHANY
WATERFALL
Inhlawe Mt
Zwarts Kop
BULWER BRIDGE
COLENSO
Amatshuku Mt
ZUNCKLES

NORTH NATAL.

steady opposition and under tropical conditions, was all-sufficient. His calculation was simple enough. Given an open alliance with the Free State, the Imperial forces would have to be divided, if only to *defend* the Cape and neutralise the disruptive elements there. Should an English army operate *offensively* from that frontier, the Transvaal army would still have time to strike a crushing blow in Natal, while the possession of shorter lines and of the railways would always make it possible to return promptly to meet the enemy coming from the South.

It has been argued that the Boers would have done better to make a dash at Cape Colony with their main body, simply holding the Natal passes with a force sufficient for their defence, for the Cape Dutch would have risen, and, together with the invaders, hurled the small British force into the sea. The plan seemed attractive enough, but the Boers had excellent reasons for making their main effort in Natal. Their hopes were bound upon a rapid and startling offensive. A brilliant victory must be won in order to convince the waverers of Dutch invincibility. No doubt, too, Mr. Kruger calculated on the effect of a disaster on public opinion in England. Now, quite apart from the military and political difficulties of getting an army through the Free State at all, a descent upon the Orange River would mean loss of time and the arrival of reinforcements from England. No decisive result might follow such an advance. The Dutch population, as has since been proved, would require the warrant of great successes in the field before venturing to join the invaders. When large armies are thrown into the scale a few thousands of insurgents will never decide a war. The French would have conquered Spain in spite of the guerillas had not the army of Wellington presented an invincible barrier to their progress; the furious hatred of Germany in 1809 and 1813 was powerless to shake Napoleon until victory deserted his eagles. Like their German kindred, the Dutch are a cautious people, and it would have needed a series of events more startling than those which actually occurred to rouse them into general and open rebellion.

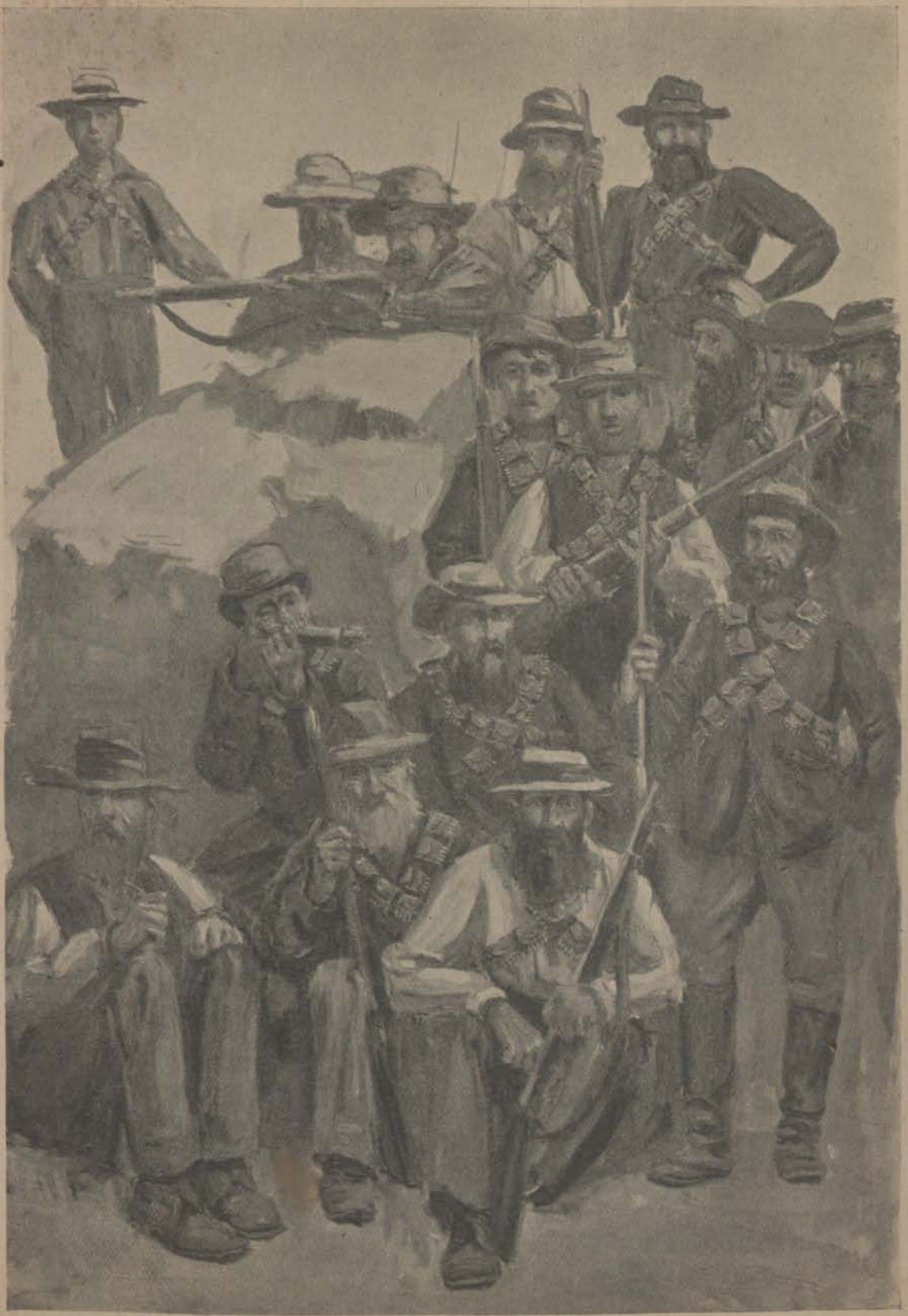
But in Natal were to be found all the conditions necessary for

great and immediate success. Here was an English army weak in numbers and badly placed in a country eminently favourable to Boer tactics. A concentration along the Natal frontier was well suited to the Transvaal railway system. The known dislike of the farmers for distant operations militated strongly in favour of fighting close to home. In a word, the descent into Natal was from every standpoint preferable to an invasion of Cape Colony.

Meanwhile, what was the state of affairs on our side?

At the time of the abortive conclusion of the Bloemfontein conference we had in Natal three battalions, two cavalry regiments, three field batteries, and a mountain battery. Their presence was necessitated by the already strained situation, but their numbers were not sufficient to allay the fears of the Colony. As early as May 25th Sir Alfred Milner had to inform the Ministry that Natal would, if necessary, be defended by "the whole force of the Empire." Partially comforted by this assurance, the Colonial Government allowed two more months to pass without further representations, but towards the end of July, Sir William Penn Symons being of opinion that he could not undertake with the then garrison and the volunteers to occupy the Colony north of Hatting's Spruit, the Ministers complained that the defence of the Dundee coalfield and the occupation of the line of railway as far as the Ingagane bridge was not a fulfilment of the High Commissioner's promise. By July 21st Symons had become convinced that 1,600 more men were necessary to enable him to hold Newcastle and ensure the country to the south against raids, but that for the defence of Laing's Nek and the entire Colony not less than 5,600 men of all arms would be required. This was communicated to the Imperial Government, and on August 3rd the Governor of Natal was informed that at least 2,000 men would be sent as soon as they were ready, and that the question of moving troops nearer the frontier was receiving consideration. This answer was only partially satisfactory. The Natal Ministry went on organising local defence, and took steps to strengthen its mounted troops, deprecating, however, the calling out of the volunteers as a step likely to drive the Boers to war.

In the meantime no progress was made with the negotiations. The



A GROUP OF BOERS.

prospect grew steadily darker. Bitter complaints were made against the home Government. A remarkable forecast, in the shape of a letter dated September 2nd, from Pietermaritzburg, said: "I wish to put on record, so to speak, the common opinion here, that while the 30,000 men are coming out Natal will be raided." No doubt existed that the Boers, far from desiring peace, would declare war as soon as they were ready. The Colony was full of disloyal Dutch. The English Government was blamed for allowing the Boers to become so strong, for not proportionately increasing the corps of occupation, for employing conciliatory methods when they were useless, and for adopting a firmer tone without supporting it with the weightier argument of soldiers. Such being the general opinion of the loyalists, a despatch arrived from Natal on September 6th urging the pressing need of large and immediate reinforcements.

From this moment the Government had three points to decide. It had to determine, firstly, whether their attitude towards the Transvaal was to be threatening or conciliatory; secondly, how many troops would be required to maintain the policy chosen; thirdly, how the force could be got to Africa without drawing a declaration of war from Pretoria. It was decided that the efforts for peace should be continued, but that 10,000 troops should be sent to ensure the safety of Cape Colony and Natal. That number was at that time thought perfectly adequate by experts on the spot and at home. As late as September 13th, Symons reported that, although from want of water an enclosed position on Laing's Nek was untenable, without a large number of men to keep open communications, an advance beyond Ladysmith was not dangerous, that with the present garrison Glencoe could safely be occupied, and with one other battalion, Newcastle. The question of the introduction of the troops into the colonies without bringing on hostilities was of supreme importance, and the consideration that the despatch of a comparatively small force was less likely to have that unfortunate effect, evidently weighed with the authorities at the moment of their decision.

The determination of the enemy to attack Symons before the arrival of the Indian contingent is an unfavourable commentary upon the Government's decision. But it may fairly be argued, taking the official

calculation that an army corps would require thirteen weeks to transport to South Africa, that it was better at once to send out in five weeks a force which could defend the colonies, and at the same time not bring undue pressure to bear upon the Dutch Republics. With the larger question of the policy of the Government we have nothing to do, but given that the military preparations of the Boers were so far advanced as in September was actually the case, negligence on the part of the latter could alone enable England to land troops sufficient to meet her enemy on an equality in the first act of the war.

While the shipment of the Natal Field Force from India and elsewhere was proceeding, a large body of the Army Service Corps were ordered to South Africa. It was to prepare the way for the army corps, should it become necessary to fight. No satisfactory reply was received to the despatch of September 22nd. A short period of suspense ensued. "The wind of words had dropped, and there was the silence of an ominous calm." Not till September 29th, after news had arrived of the resolution of the Free State Volksraad (September 27th) did the Cabinet order the mobilisation of a corps. As supplies and transport were not ready, the calling out of the reserve was deferred till October 8th. Admirable as was the men's response, the first transport did not sail till October 20th. In the meanwhile the Boer mobilisation, commenced on September 29th, had been completed. On October 10th their uncompromising ultimatum arrived, and Steyn openly threw in his lot with the Transvaal. At 5 p.m. on the 11th the time for a reply expired, and on the 12th the Boers advanced into Natal. The Republics had gained their month's start. During that period (October 12th to the middle of November) they were free to carry out their plans undisturbed by the entry of new factors.

It was well for England that they were unable, as originally intended, to commence war a week earlier. Not till October 2nd did the English contingent from India begin to arrive at Durban. Sir George White did not land until the 7th. He had at first gone to Cape Town, but so serious was the news from Natal that he hurried thither at once. He found the Colony somewhat relieved by the arrival of reinforcements and the immobility of the enemy. It had

passed an anxious week. Rumour of the Boer mobilisation in the last days of September had thrown the country into a state of violent alarm. Reports agreed as to the increasing masses of burghers at Sandspruit, Laing's Nek, Vryheid, Utrecht, and Harrismith, and it was expected that the invasion would begin on Monday, October 2nd. Volunteers were hurried to Ladysmith; and in a few days the irregular forces, including the Imperial Light Horse, mainly formed of Johannesburgers, numbered 2,000 strong. But suddenly the panic died away. A last effort, it was rumoured, was being made in the cause of peace; the Boer generals contemplated no immediate movement.

The fact was that their transport had broken down. All the available rolling stock had been used to carry the troops to the frontiers. The narrow space in which they were congregated had exhausted local resources, and without further supplies an advance was impossible. The delivery of the ultimatum was postponed for a week, the transports began to reach Durban, and there arose a feeling of confidence which the real state of affairs in no way warranted.

The only possible explanation of the British dispositions is a complete ignorance of the strength of the enemy. No so-called political reason—and what step can have a worse effect upon a wavering population than a forced retirement from an untenable position?—can justify the deliberate exposure of troops to a converging attack from an opponent greatly superior in numbers and local advantages. Neither the gallant officer who arranged the plan of defence nor Sir George White, who ultimately sanctioned it, would have considered for one moment the safety of the Dundee coalfields or the retention of the northern part of the Colony had they expected that the Boer onslaught would be so strong and dangerous.

From the moment when Symons announced that with the available garrison Glencoe was the northernmost point that could be safely defended, the coal supply from Dundee became an important factor in official calculations. On September 13th the Governor of Natal had advocated the occupation of that point if the reply from the Transvaal was unsatisfactory. On September 22nd he explained that he had delayed giving the order because the Ministry had changed their

opinion, thought that the Boers did not intend to attack, and advised that no advance should be made till enough troops had arrived to defend the whole Colony. As the country as far as Newcastle could be occupied, if necessary, in twenty-four hours without further reinforcements, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson considered there was no need of hurry. By the third week in October, he calculated, we should be able to garrison the whole country with the Indian contingent, whereas if we moved at once 3,000 Boers would seize Laing's Nek. On the receipt of a copy of our despatch of the 22nd, however, the Governor immediately occupied Glencoe. On September 25th the movement was completed. On September 28th news of the enemy's mobilisation arrived, and the Natal volunteers were called out. In the following days the bridges from Colenso to Newcastle were guarded, and those further to the north watched.

Symons now definitely resolved to abandon Newcastle. On September 21st he had been prepared to occupy it. What led to this timely change of opinion we do not know. Probably he had realised that the coming attack would be of a much more serious nature than he had at first anticipated. The Governor still clung to the hope that the town might be saved, fearing the effect of its capture upon the Cape Dutch, but the High Commissioner showed his insight in placing a lower estimate on its importance, and Symons gained his point. Greater emphasis than ever was now laid upon the defence of the Dundee coalfields. The political effect of a retirement from that place would, it was said, be disastrous. The minds of those in authority had not yet exchanged the vague and difficult calculations of the statesman in peace for the more tangible realities with which he has to deal in war. Symons was confident of being able to maintain his position, and Sir George White waived his objections, thinking that the military risk was the lesser of two evils. No strategical idea was or could have been involved in the occupation of Glencoe. It was simply held as a point essential to the prestige of the British, for the output of coal ceased on the outbreak of hostilities and further supplies were brought from India.

At the moment when the Boers closed in upon the British, the position of the latter was briefly the following :—

General Symons with four infantry battalions[1] under General Yule, one cavalry regiment,[2] three field batteries,[3] and a detachment of 200 mounted police, some 4,000 men in all, lay in the open camp between Dundee and Glencoe. So placed, he could bar the road and railway leading south and oppose any attack from the Buffalo River by way of

THE LATE MAJOR-GENERAL SIR W. P. SYMONS, K.C.B.

De Jager's Drift and Landmann's Drift, respectively some fourteen and eighteen miles by road from Dundee. He was exposed to an attack from Vant's Drift further to the south along the Helpmakaar Road.

Forty-three to forty-five miles south-west by road and rail, General

[1] 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1st Leicestershire Regiment, 1st King's Royal Rifles. [2] 18th Hussars. [3] 13th, 67th, 69th.

White was quickly massing his troops at Ladysmith. His total force had not yet arrived, but was to muster three cavalry regiments[1] (General French), eight infantry battalions,[2] three field batteries,[3] No. 10 mountain battery, and a Colonial contingent between 2,000 and 3,000 strong. In all the Commander-in-chief could count upon having 11,000 men under him, though of course all these would not be disposable for active operations.

Ladysmith was a healthy campaign ground, well supplied with water. It was tactically a very bad position, but it had been chosen as a base of operations in Natal, and large stores had been accumulated there. As the point of junction of the main communications with the Transvaal and the Free State it was strategically important. It was Sir George White's business to meet an advance from the Free State passes of Van Reenen, Bezuidenhout, and Oliver's Hoek, besides others, those named being respectively thirty-four, forty-two, and sixty miles distant from Ladysmith. He had also to keep open communications with Symons. The campaign was to be of an offensive-defensive character; that is to say, the British were to await the enemy's approach and to strike at the heads of his columns whenever and wherever an opportunity occurred.

It was hoped that by this arrangement the Natal force would hold its own until such time as Sir Redvers Buller and the army corps moving through the Free State should take the main body of the Boers off its hands and enable it to assume the offensive. The execution of Buller's project would largely depend on the result of the operations of White and Symons. Their dispositions would be suitable enough so long as the two British columns were *separately* strong enough to beat the enemy opposed to them. If they were not, the division of forces would entail serious risk. In the first place, since White could not advance to Symons' aid without having first

[1] 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, 5th Dragoon Guards.

[2] 1st Devonshire, 1st Gloucestershire, 1st Manchester, 2nd Gordons (under General Hamilton), 1st Liverpool, 2nd Rifle Brigade, 2nd King's Royal Rifles, 1st Border Regiment (not present at Ladysmith, afterwards in Hart's Brigade).

[3] 21st, 42nd, 53rd.

cleared his rear of Free Staters, the 4,000 men at Dundee would have to bear the first shock of the enemy's main army. In the second place, there was a danger that the Boers would send part of their troops across the Biggarsberg by the western road which runs over the Mkupe Pass to Elandslaagte, and so intercept the communications of the British generals, rendering mutual assistance doubly difficult. The railway was of course too exposed to be relied on as a means of rapidly reinforcing either wing.

Judged as a whole, the strategical dispositions were haphazard. They were determined by other than military considerations, and based upon a totally false estimate of the enemy's strength. This was the root-error from which all the others sprang. Hence came it that the plan of defence rested on a wide occupation of frontier instead of on a strong well-prepared base. From the beginning, the authorities built the top storey before they laid the foundations. So little chance did there seem of the Boers ever getting to Ladysmith, that the ground between that town and the Tugela was not even mapped. While it was obvious that the great triangle enclosed by the Tugela, the Buffalo, and the Drakensberg would be the object of the attack, no attempt was made to withdraw south of the Tugela or to concentrate north of it.

The disadvantages of a mountainous country were equally disregarded. The offensive power of the Boers was, in the opinion of the authorities, limited to raiding. The word "raid" constantly occurs in the despatches; sudden dashes at our communications were expected, but it was presumed that a thin cordon of troops would be able to repel them. Of a grand offensive movement in superior force there is no mention. The idea that Laing's Nek could be held by two batteries and two battalions strikes one as ludicrous in the light of subsequent events. Scarcely less extraordinary is the belief that the whole Colony could be kept clear of Boers by an army of 15,000 men. The hillmen of North-West India would be treated with as much respect. Later, when wiser counsels seemed likely to prevail, they were swept aside on the score of political expediency. Hence the position of Symons at Glencoe, which endangered his own force, hampered and weakened White, and gave the Boers an advantage which a force so superior in

numbers, tactical mobility, and knowledge of ground should have turned into overwhelming victory.

It should, however, not be forgotten that, while our War Office in failing to gain a real insight into the enemy's strength neglected to obtain the first indispensable condition of a successful campaign, it had before it a problem for whose solution the data were utterly vague and inadequate. Nothing probably is harder to estimate than the military value of an untried force, especially when it consists of irregulars. The fights of 1881 had been on a very small scale. Few people in Europe, if any, credited the Boers with much capacity for large and complicated operations. Rightly or wrongly much blame has been laid at the door of our Intelligence Department for not keeping the Government informed of the increasing armaments of the Dutch Republics. But armaments alone never made an army. It was the efficiency of the Boers as soldiers in the field that we hopelessly underestimated, and it was this failure, and not the long range of their artillery, which led to our early reverses. Surely a more difficult task was never set to a military spy than to give an accurate report on the probable capabilities of a system barely visible in a concrete form in time of peace. The bold, elaborate, and, in spite of defeats, successful offensive which dominated the course of the campaign up to the investment of Ladysmith was scarcely within the bounds of expectation. Though the difficulties of their task should not blind us to the extraordinary miscalculation that our authorities made, they should, in part at any rate, mitigate their error in the eyes of impartial men.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF TALANA HILL AND THE RETREAT OF YULE

THE BOER PLAN—THE ADVANCE INTO NATAL—THE FREE STATERS CONTAIN WHITE—APPROACH OF JOUBERT—SITUATION OF SYMONS—THE POSITION OF TALANA HILL—THE BATTLE—SYMONS WOUNDED—LOSS OF THE HUSSARS—CONDUCT OF ERASMUS—AFTER THE BATTLE—SATURDAY—SUNDAY—RESOLVE TO RETREAT—THE FIRST NIGHT—VAN JONDER'S PASS—WASCHBANK SPRUIT—LADYSMITH—RECORD OF THE MARCH

WELL informed as to our movements, the Boers arranged a scheme of attack by which the fullest use was to be made of their remarkably strong strategical position on the flanks of our weak and divided forces. While the Free Staters held White fast with demonstrations, Joubert was to descend upon Glencoe, and with the assistance of the eastern commandos, to envelope and destroy Symons. The feint against Ladysmith was to begin at once, but as the Commandant-General [1] was more than twice as far from Dundee as were Lucas Meyer's troops in their laagers behind the Buffalo River, the latter was to wait until Joubert was so far advanced as to ensure the correct timing of the combined attack.

Strong in their belief in the justice of their cause and in the special favours that Providence was to shower upon them, the Boers swept down upon Natal. On October 11th Laing's Nek was occupied. Next day the head of the main column reached Ingogo, the Johannesburg commando under Viljoen, together with Schiel's artillery, gathered behind Botha's Pass, and on the west of Ladysmith Van Reenen's Pass

[1] Joubert had from seventy to eighty miles to march, whereas Utrecht and Vryheid were only thirty-six and forty-three miles from Dundee, and the bulk of the eastern Boers were already in position on the Doornberg or echeloned along the road behind it.

was reported strongly held. On the 13th a force of Free Staters estimated at from 10,000 to 15,000 strong, with artillery, thronged the defiles of the Drakensberg, and a strong reconnaisance located the enemy near Van Reenen and Oliver's Hoek. All along the mountains appeared parties of Boers, patrols were pushed up to Bester's, and waggons collected at the foot of the Tintwa. Everything seemed to point to an immediate onslaught upon Ladysmith. On the 15th, in the hope of forcing them to disclose their positions, White pushed a flying column towards the hills, but it encountered no resistance, and returned without accomplishing its object.

The weakness of the English general's position was now clear. Naturally sensitive as to attacks upon his left flank, he was unable, owing to want of numbers and mobility, to rid himself of the danger by a vigorous offensive. He dared not attempt to force the mighty barrier frowning two marches away to the west, for he had barely 8,000 available troops; and he could not reinforce Symons without exposing Ladysmith to serious risk in his absence. He was quite unable to utilise the interior lines which he commanded, or to avail himself of the main strategical advantage of his position, namely, the opportunity of inflicting a crushing defeat on the Free Staters before the Transvaalers could join them. Unable to reach the enemy by a rapid advance, he could only hope that they would come within striking distance of their own accord. Meanwhile their superior numbers and their proximity to Ladysmith kept him anxious and inactive, powerless either to help his lieutenant or to strike a blow himself.

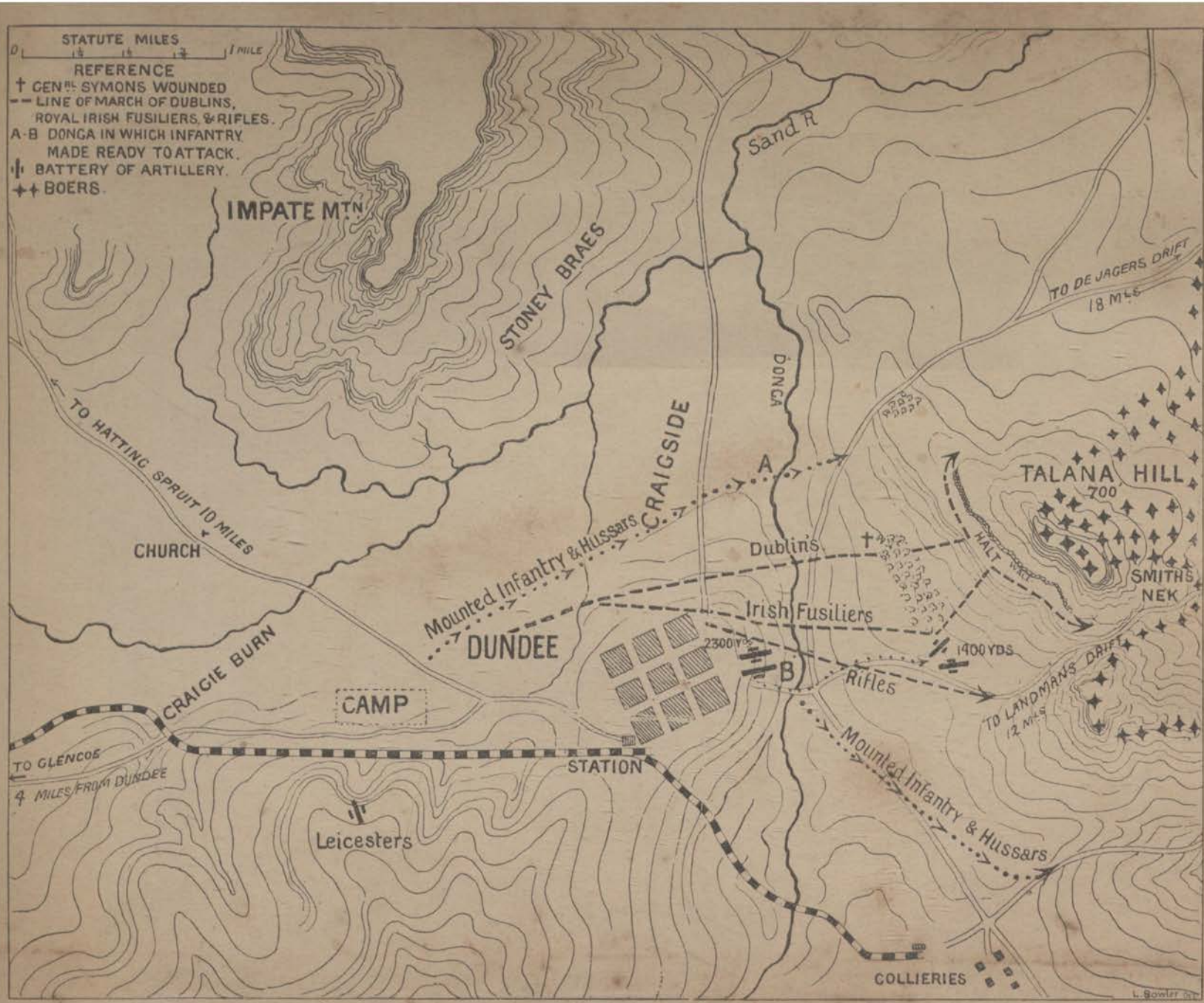
The Free Staters played their part well. For a week they neutralised the main English force, on three occasions, on the 13th, 15th, and 17th, cheating it with the hope that they were advancing to deliver battle. This part of their task was nearly done. By the night of the 18th the net that was to enclose Symons was narrowing fast. Joubert's scouts had been sighted at Hatting's Spruit, seven miles from Glencoe, and the eastern commandos were preparing to cross the Buffalo. The first crisis of the campaign was near at hand.

The main Boer column, perhaps 12,000 strong, had made slow pro-

gress. Newcastle had been occupied on the 14th, and on the night of the 15th a large camp was reported at Dannhauser, some twelve miles from Glencoe, but next day the commissariat broke down, and the great mass of the burghers fell back across the Ingagane River. On the 17th the forward movement was resumed. Viljoen's commando, 1,250 strong, pushed on across the Biggarsberg, equally threatening Symons' rear and the railway near Elandslaagte. Joubert did not mend his pace as he drew near his objective, partly perhaps because he hoped to lure the English to attack him, partly because his transport was still insufficient. The heavy guns which the Boers brought with them seem to have delayed their movement. The fact remains that they had taken a week to march seventy miles.

Meanwhile General Symons was waiting for a hostile column to arrive within easy reach, when he intended to fall upon it with all his available strength. Like his chief at Ladysmith, he was threatened in flank and rear. In his case, too, weakness of numbers made it impossible to turn to account the dispersion of the enemy's columns. Joubert was altogether too strong to attack; Lucas Meyer, also superior in numbers, was covered by the line of the Buffalo and the hills to the east. That river Symons could not hold effectively, so the passages fell into the enemy's hands. They made the most of the opportunity. Parties of Boers incessantly patrolled the banks, keeping the whole district in a state of alarm, and severely trying the endurance of our small force of mounted men. On the night of the 13th an English patrol on the Helpmakaar road was fired on; next day six police were captured at De Jager's Drift, more than thirty miles higher up. The reports agreed as to the superiority of the enemy, and it was clear that several columns were converging upon the British position.

Symons' situation was highly critical. At any moment he might find himself attacked by three times his own strength, and either isolated or forced to make a difficult retreat through a bad country. To maintain his position during the first week of hostilities required a degree of enduring audacity scarcely surpassed by that which he showed in the battle in which his career was to find a glorious end. A haughty confidence in his soldiers and his own capacity, and



TALANA HILL (OCTOBER 20, 1899).

perhaps a resolve to teach the Boers that Majuba was no measure of what English infantry could do, may well have sustained him through the anxious period of expectation now drawing to a close. Reports on the evening of the 19th convinced him that the enemy would attack in a few hours. A night assault was expected, but the dark hours passed without disturbance. Dawn came, and, according to custom, the men stood to arms. An eastern column of Boers was now within five miles of them. At 3.20 a.m. the Mounted Infantry post at the junction of the De Jager and Landmann's Drift roads had been attacked, and a private wounded.

The British camp was north of the Glencoe-Dundee railway, one and a half miles west of the latter. Its site had not been chosen with any special regard to tactical considerations, but rather, as was the case with Ladysmith, because it was healthy and well watered. The situation was between the towns, so as to be within reach of the Pass of Glencoe and the Dundee collieries. To the north rose the Impate mountain, three or four miles away. One and a half miles east of Dundee the road to the Buffalo Drifts crosses Smith's Nek; immediately north of this col stands the abrupt ridge of Talana, 700 feet above the town, and to the south a lower hill called Smith's Kopje.

It was on the top of the Talana, at about 5.30 a.m., that the enemy were first sighted. A few minutes later their first shell, fired at a range of 5,000 yards, whistled over the heads of the troops and fell in the camp. The game had begun at last. Sir William Symons had no doubt long before weighed the contingency which now faced him, and determined on his course of action. He resolved to drive the Boers from Talana by a frontal attack. His orders were issued unhesitatingly. The risk of an attack from Hatting's Spruit was taken and provided for. The Leicesters and the 67th Battery remained behind to guard against any hostile developments from the north and west. The 18th Hussars were ordered to move out to the left and get round Talana so as to cut off the enemy's retreat, the cavalry thus forming an additional protection to the most exposed flank as well as threatening the immediate enemy in flank and rear. With Colonel

Möller went the mounted infantry company of the Dublins, a section of that of the Rifles, and a machine gun.

The main attack upon the enemy's position was entrusted to the Rifles, the 2nd Dublins, and the 1st Royal Irish. Their advance was to be prepared and protected by the 13th and 69th Batteries under Majors Wing and Dawkins.

The enemy's long-range fire continued, but the percussion fuses failing to ignite, it was ineffective. Our own artillery, finding the range too long for shrapnel, dashed forward into a position south of Dundee and opened a telling fire upon the Talana crest, covering it with the smoke of bursting shell. The Boer reply grew perceptibly weaker, and taking advantage of the lull, the infantry began their movement and reached the Sandspruit, the dry bed of which running north and south about half a mile east of the town gave excellent cover. Here the men took off their great coats and made their last preparations.

In the absence of reliable maps it is difficult accurately to apportion the various distances, but it would seem that the flat piece of grassland which they had to cross measured about half a mile in breadth, and that the open wood at the foot of the hill was about 200 yards deep, being bordered on the far side by a wall. Smith's farm was in the southern or right-hand portion of this plantation. The wall half-way up the hill, which the Boers made their first line of defence, must have run along the slope from 300 to 500 yards above the wood. Behind the wall lay a flat plateau, and behind this again the bare precipitous face led directly to the crest-line. This crest appears to rise from the south in a succession of steps, each furnishing a certain amount of "dead ground," but the west face up which the Dublins had to go seems to be more open.

Thus far the enemy's rifles had not come into play, but when, at 7.30, our infantry began to cross the level tract to the wood, a fierce plunging fire burst upon them. From every part of the hill a storm of shot swept the broad front of the advance, but the gliding lines, moving swiftly by half-companies, baffled their opponents' aim, and the casualties were few. Those which occurred were chiefly among the Dublins, who formed the first line of the brigade.

BRINGING UP THE GUNS.

At 8 a.m. the wood was reached, and the men took shelter in the ditches that traversed it. The rifle fire had now increased in intensity. Fortunately much of it went high, a common fault in shooting down-hill. The battalions had by this time become somewhat mixed, but still working by half-companies the firing line pressed on to the front of the wood, General Symons moving about in the hottest of the fire and animating the men by his words and example.

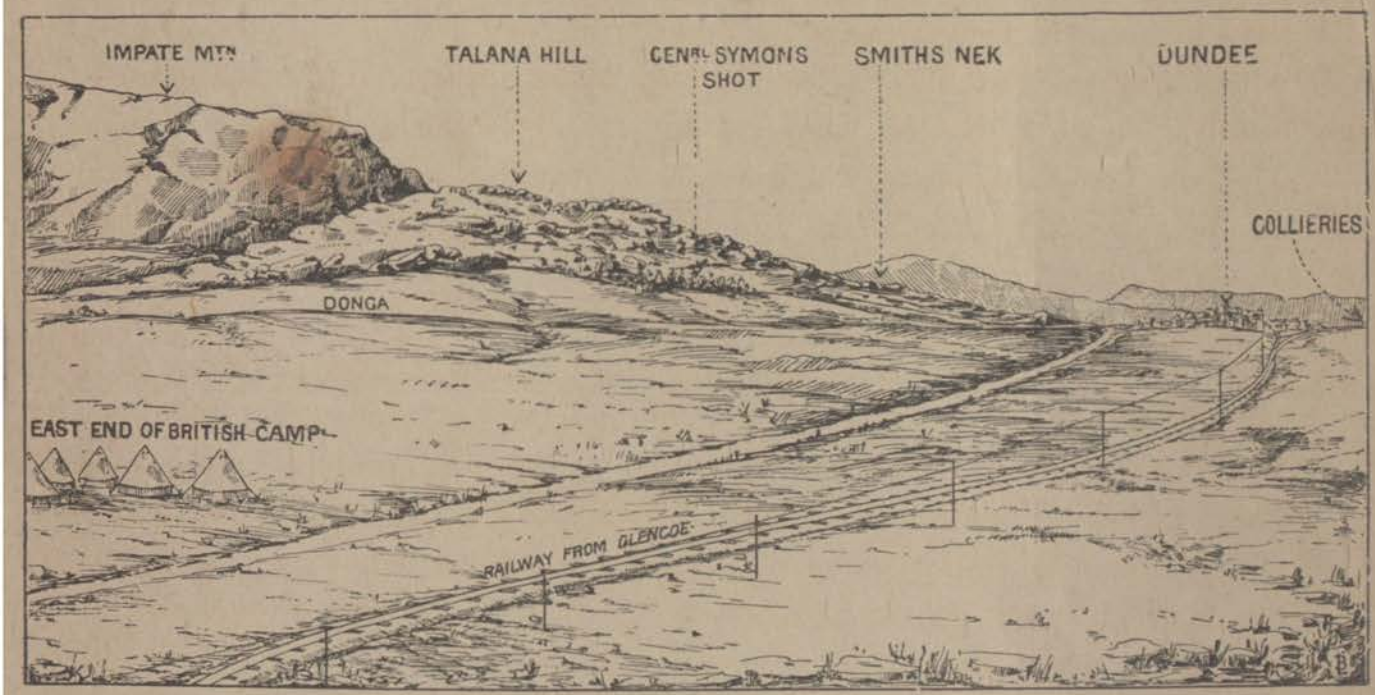
All this time the two batteries had been doing splendid work. Galloping forward through the town amid the cheers of the inhabitants, they had taken position west of Sandspruit, at a range of 2,300 yards. The 69th concentrated its fire on the Talana Ridge, the 13th against Smith's Kopje. As the whole of the infantry attack had been turned on Talana, possession of which would make the lower hill untenable, the Boers on the latter, freed from direct pressure, plied our flank with an enfilading fire, the Rifles who formed the right wing suffering considerably. This fire it was the task of the 13th Battery to quell, and the work was carried out with admirable accuracy and perseverance.

It was at this stage that the enemy was most aggressive. A tremendous fire was concentrated upon the edge of the wood, the Boers striving hard to drive our infantry back and to break the vigour of the coming onset before it could develop. Once a body of the enemy ensconced themselves in a cattle kraal on the slope of Smith's Kopje, whence they could bring to bear a more effectual flanking fire, but the British guns quickly got the range, and drove them out. Meanwhile the infantry in the wood never flinched, patiently enduring the furious fusilade and sweeping the slopes above them with a ceaseless hail of bullets. Sorely handicapped by their position and the invisibility of the foe, the men held on until 8.50, when they were ordered to leave the wood and commence the assault of the hill. Shallow gullies running upwards offered little cover, and so heavy seemed the task, that ten minutes later the General called up his reserves, and advanced with them through the wood.

Then the gallant commander who had brought the battle to a crisis was mortally wounded. He was struck in the stomach by a rifle bullet when near the left-hand edge of the wood, where shot

was falling thickest. Making light of his hurt, he for some time remained with the troops, fearing lest the news of his departure might shake their confidence. The command he handed over to Brigadier Yule.

Through a dreadful fire the first line pressed out of the wood on to the bare hillside. Men fell fast as, sometimes running forward, sometimes lying down to fire, sometimes brought to a standstill by a rain of bullets that made persistence a useless waste of life, the Rifles



GENERAL VIEW FROM BRITISH CAMP OF IMPATE MOUNTAIN AND TALANA HILL.

on the right and the Dublins on the left slowly gained ground. As part of the former passed through a gateway beyond the farm they lost heavily, but pushing on to some rocks they swung their right round and crossed the road sharply smitten by the flanking fire from Smith's Kopje. Fighting with splendid tenacity the men struggled forward, eventually reaching the Boer wall and holding it doggedly in spite of the efforts of the enemy. Officer after officer went down: Lieutenant Hambro twice wounded before he was killed by a shell, Colonel Sherston the Brigade-Major, Pechell, and others.

Nor were the Boers behind in devoted courage. Threatened by the thickly-gathering attack below and exposed to a shell fire that seemed to search with pitiless precision every yard of the summit, they clung grimly to their last vantage ground. Their rifle fire never slackened, their guns over-matched in skill and numbers maintained the unequal contest though gradually losing in steadiness and regularity. Giving up the useless struggle with our batteries, their quick-firers bent their last efforts upon our infantry. One by one they were silenced. The last to continue fire was a Maxim. By 11.30 that also ceased firing, and our artillery went in to decisive range and poured a torrent of shrapnel upon the obstinate riflemen whose musketry still crashed along the ridge. Slowly and reluctantly that fire too flickered out, and the hardly-tried infantry pushed on, two companies of Irish Fusiliers filling the gap between the Rifles and the Dublins.

It was now past midday. The shell fire seemed thoroughly to have demoralised the enemy, and the British were preparing for the last rush, when several men in the Rifles, pushing too far, were hit by one of our own shells. A temporary confusion resulted, and the men fell back to the wall, but the fire was fortunately stopped, word being sent to warn the batteries that the infantry were about to storm. The guns ceased, the Rifles and Royal Irish bounded over the wall, and darting across the plateau began scaling the precipitous ground in front. So steep was the slope that the men had to scramble up on their hands and knees, the Boers firing sharply all the time. Not a few fell, but the distance was short and the rush swift. Hardly pausing to fire, they dashed in a confused body over the crest and ran in with the bayonet.

The Boers were in no mood to stand this final test. Eleven prisoners were taken, and the rest fled, leaving quantities of ammunition and other stores in our hands. The men on Smith's Kopje must have given way when they saw that the Talana Ridge was taken. Hurrying in wild rout down the opposite slope, they retreated towards the Buffalo Drifts. Some ran to find their horses, but the Hussars were before them, and part were taken prisoners and

THE BATTLE OF TALANA HILL.

part fell beneath the pursuing sabres. The defeat was complete; had not a group of Boers shown a white flag, and so stopped our artillery on the Smith's Nek road from firing on the huddled flyers, the commando would have been half destroyed. When the deceit was discovered it was too late, the wiry horses of the Boers easily distancing the batteries who could not pursue rapidly over the broken ground.

An untoward occurrence which, though directly a part of the battle, was unknown at the time, partly marred the results of the victory. Colonel Möller had gained the rear of the enemy, and sent two squadrons of Hussars in pursuit to the east. With the rest of his force he seems to have moved to the northward, to have come upon the troops of Joubert, to have been surrounded by superior numbers and forced to surrender. Though the accounts vary considerably, it is clear that the little force gave considerable trouble to the victors, that it had to be forced from several positions after sharp fighting, and remained under fire from early in the morning to late in the afternoon. Finding himself outnumbered, Colonel Möller endeavoured to retreat to Dundee round the northern flanks of the Impate mountain, but a party of Boers barred the way, and he took up a position near a farmhouse. With the mounted infantry on a height to the rear, and the horses covered by the buildings, the combat was maintained for three hours, after which the ammunition gave out. The Boers then brought up cannon, and the men, in the words of an officer, were making ready to sell their lives dear, when their commander, anxious to avoid further bloodshed, hoisted the white flag. Eighty-two men of the Hussars, eighty of the mounted infantry of the Dublins, fourteen of the 60th Rifles, and nine officers were taken prisoners, the casualties numbering about twenty. Ignorance of the very broken ground, over-eagerness, and, it is fair to presume, insufficient scouting had carried the force too far, and gave the enemy an opportunity which their large numbers and topographical knowledge turned into a complete success. Möller's disaster was the first of a series of humiliating mishaps which were to befall our arms, and to teach us the danger of sending weak detachments into the midst of cool-headed and mobile opponents.

Such were the main features of the fight of Talana which added

another name to the long and glorious list of the achievements of British infantry. Our losses were not disproportionate to the success. That success, as was soon proved, was, owing to the initial error of holding Dundee at all, moral rather than material. The enemy learnt to respect the British soldier. The length and desperate nature of the action, the iron endurance of the assailants, the nerve-shaking artillery

GENERAL LUCAS MEYER.

fire, and the last unfaltering charge whose impetuosity the stubborn defenders dared not confront, made a deep impression upon the burghers. Perhaps when the history of the struggle is finally written it will be agreed that Symons's victory was worth more to the English cause than material advantages won by more cautious methods.

Unfortunately numerical weakness prevented his gallant soldiers

from following up the defeat of Meyer by a decisive blow at Joubert. Even the position won could not be maintained. To have done so would have been to expose the communications, and so increase the risk of isolation. The wounded were collected and taken to Dundee, and then through drenching rain and mist the weary troops returned to camp.

Our losses were an eloquent tribute to the self-sacrificing devotion of the officers and to the gallantry of the men. According to the official despatch, thirty officers and 165 non-commissioned officers and men were killed and wounded, and including Möller's force, 211 men and nine officers missing. Another estimate places the losses of the Rifles at eleven officers (out of seventeen) and eighty-seven men, those of the Dublins at five officers and fifty men, and those of the Royal Irish at seven officers and forty-five men. To attempt any comparison of the services rendered would be invidious, but we may say that from start to finish the first-named corps was in the thick of the fighting, that the casualties of the Royal Irish were borne mainly by the two companies who shared in the storming of the crest (the other six having remained in reserve), and that the Dublins, though losing barely more than half as many men as the Rifles, had a full share in the fierce fight on the lower slopes, though the openness of the ground prevented their getting so far forward as to be able to join in the assault. The Rifles seem to have partially turned the ridge from the road, while the Irish Regiment were directly opposite the face.

Of the Boer losses far less accurate statistics can be given. Thirty killed and wounded were lying on the summit when our infantry carried it. About seventy wounded were found in the enemy's hospital. The English estimate of 500 seems too high. It is hardly likely that the Boers suffered more heavily than we did. Thanks to the use of the white flag they almost entirely escaped the heavy losses that are the inevitable consequences of retreat before a vigorous enemy. During the battle they were in well-covered positions. Our infantry fire had probably little material effect, and even the shell fire is more likely to have cowed than killed. Hence the figures sent home by Dalziel's correspondent (November 20th), which were based upon hospital reports,

are probably not much below the truth. He gives the total at forty-two killed, ninety-one wounded.

The momentary effect of the defeat was great, and telegrams purporting to come from Dutch sources bore witness to the terror and demoralisation which it caused. It was said that the Boers had suffered heavily, and that the Utrecht and Vryheid commandos had been captured. Another telegram, said to be the official report of Commandant Trichardt, runs thus :—

"The Ermelo burghers in charge of the artillery apparently fled from Dundee. They were reinforced by sixty (?) Pretoria burghers under Erasmus. The English opened a sharp fire, and De Jäger with a Krupp yielded. Our wounded are numerous, including Commandant Grobler, and we also lost 243 prisoners."

A third telegram places Meyer's force at 6,000 men, and states that it "was several times repulsed." Probably the commando was scattered all over the country, and its losses were consequently exaggerated. The English estimate of the Boer strength was 4,000.

One other point with regard to the Talana fight, and that a most important one, remains to be discussed. The night before the battle, Joubert's column was at Hatting's Spruit, seven or eight miles from Dundee Camp. It was probably intended that Erasmus, one of his lieutenants, should engage Symons and lure him by a feigned retreat into the hills, when Lucas Meyer would fall suddenly upon his flank and rear. Had this scheme been carried out we could hardly have escaped a disaster. Meyer, however, turned up too soon. Even under these circumstances, had Erasmus acted with vigour and himself played the part intended for Meyer, the result would have been approximately the same. As part of his troops actually appeared on the field, his failure to do so is still more extraordinary. Joubert's assertion that the want of co-operation was due to mist falls to the ground in view of the fact that the early part of the morning was fine, and that the advanced troops actually found their way to the proper point.

About half-past seven a body of Boers were sighted on a ridge west of the camp, but a few rounds from the 67th Battery drove them away, and they were not seen again. Never was a more favourable

opportunity wasted. That Symons was aware that he might have 5,000 fresh enemies on his flank while he was engaged in a desperate struggle on Talana Hill, makes the daring of that attack all the more astonishing. Erasmus' feebleness, according to a telegram, was due to the "exhaustion of his men and horses, and to his being decoyed

MAJOR-GENERAL J. H. YULE.

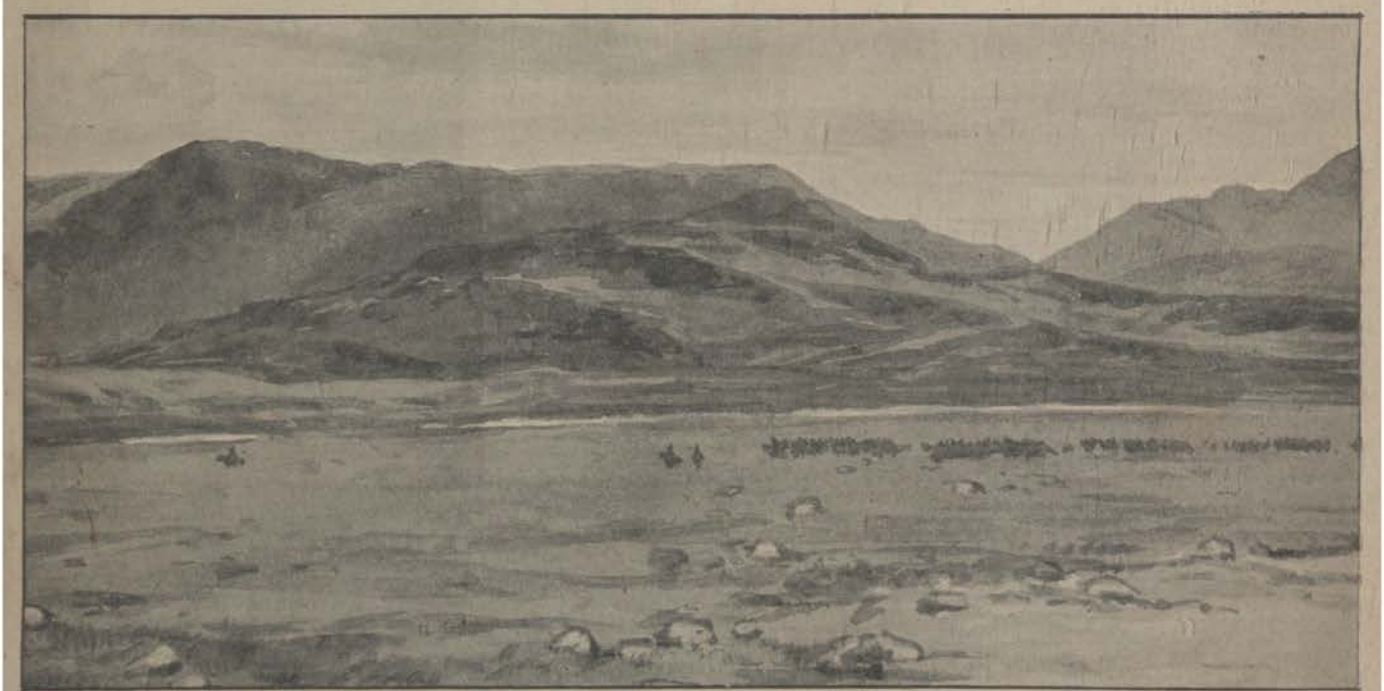
in a wrong direction by the enemy. The last part of this explanation is unintelligible, the first is more probable, and brings to light the inadequacy of our enemy's system. It is quite possible that Erasmus' men became unruly, and refused to advance. Whatever the reason, the failure to co-operate with Meyer was the first great blunder that the Boers committed.

Little rest was in store for the British. On Saturday morning General Yule withdrew his main body into a more defensible position south of the railway, leaving a strong detachment, including the Leicestershire Regiment, to guard the old camp and the baggage. About four o'clock in the afternoon a heavy gun on the Impate mountain, by some reported to have been a 6 inch 94-lb. Creusot (or "Long Tom"), by others a 40-lb. Krupp, opened fire upon the transport and stores. As on the previous day, the percussion fuses refused to act, the only shell which burst killing an officer and a private of the Leicesters. The new camp was also fired on, the men behaving with admirable steadiness, part entrenching, part lying on the bare hillside under a downpour of rain alternating with shells.

Reports showed that, though Lucas Meyer's commando made no sign of returning to Talana, the enemy were massing in great strength to the northward. The British commander was placed in a most trying situation. His wounded, including General Symons, in Dundee itself, and his supplies in the camp, were liable to a sudden attack and exposed to fire from overwhelmingly superior guns. Three-fourths of his infantry were exhausted with the fight of the day before, and their efficiency was seriously reduced by the terrible loss of officers. The divisional staff had had to be reconstituted. One squadron of the cavalry had not returned, and their loss aroused just apprehension. A second battle was out of the question, for he had neither the men nor did he know the whereabouts of the enemy. And yet if he did not attack he would have to retreat. To remain where he was, was to risk being surrounded. Such must have been the painful reflections which passed through General Yule's mind on the night of Saturday.

Early on Sunday he moved still farther to the south-east only to find, when the mists dissolved, that he was still within shot of the enemy's guns, two of which had been advanced on to a spur of Impate and at half-past four opened fire from a range of 8,000 yards. Fortunately for us the mist settled down again and the enemy ceased firing. Yule had by this time made up his mind to retreat. It remained to decide upon the route. The news of Elandslaagte, received by wire from Greytown at 8 a.m., cheering though it was, further showed the danger

of his position. The Boers had already been upon his direct communications, and it was more than probable that they were occupying the line of retreat on his immediate left. A reconnaissance pushed at ten o'clock towards Glencoe proved that the pass was strongly held and the railway cut. The only alternative was to retire by the Helpmakaar road by Beith, traverse the Biggarsberg by Van Jonder's Pass, and thence over the Waschbank and Sunday's rivers to Ladysmith. It was, above all, essential that a long start should be gained. Should the



THE WASCHBANK, ON THE LINE RUNNING FROM GLENCOE TO LADYSMITH.

Boers succeed in overtaking and enveloping the column the destruction of the whole force as a fighting unit was certain. It was decided to hold the position boldly for the rest of the day and to withdraw at nightfall.

The anxious hours dragged slowly away. Though the Boers made no direct attack, the cannon-fire was resumed when the state of the atmosphere permitted, and the men loading waggons during the afternoon were constantly exposed to falling shell. The reconnaissance had returned to camp at 1 p.m., the field batteries having endeavoured to come into action, but had been forced to retire by the sudden recom-

mencement of the Impate guns. A squadron of Hussars also came into contact with superior forces, and had to retire. It is doubtful if General Yule did or could have made any direct effort to intercept the fugitives from Elaandslaagte. His distance from the field of battle, his necessary ignorance of the enemy's line of retreat, and his weak force of cavalry rendered any such operation dangerous and unprofitable.

Towards evening orders for the retreat were issued. It was resolved, both on account of their safety and the difficulties of transport, to abandon the wounded, and with them remained the whole medical staff and equipment. The officers and men's kits had also to be left behind, and only provisions and ammunition for four days were taken. At 9 p.m. the column started. The evacuation of the old camp was effected in absolute silence, and two hours later the whole was on the move, slowly defiling through Dundee. The Rifles, under Major Campbell, acted as advanced guard, the baggage was in the centre. The Helpmakaar road was reached without arousing the suspicions of the Boers, and the troops trudged steadily away into the night.

The route mounts steadily from the town, and runs to Beith, some sixteen miles away. It is not a good road, and was in especially bad condition owing to the recent rain. The men were worn by three days of incessant moral and physical strain, and were sorely in need of sleep. They were now falling back under most depressing circumstances. Their efforts seemed vain, their wounded comrades—amongst them a well-loved and well-trusted leader—had been abandoned to the enemy. The behaviour of the whole force in such stress of mind and body was as admirable as the desperate valour which had stormed the heights of Talana.

By daybreak eight miles had been left behind, and the Blesbok Pass cleared. A halt was made on a ridge to the eastward till ten o'clock, when the march was continued. The Zurfontein plateau was passed, and at four in the afternoon the junction of the Waschbank and Helpmakaar roads was reached. The most critical part of the business was yet to come. So far the march had been over a rugged upland; the column had now to wheel to the south-west and plunge into a deep and narrow defile, seven or eight miles long.

Joubert might easily have occupied this pass of Van Jonder with a few hundreds of men and either compelled the column to surrender or completely broken it up. The shooting of a few baggage oxen would have frightfully confused and imperilled the descent of the English troops along the miry and boulder-covered track. General Yule must certainly have reconnoitred the gorge with his cavalry before the less wieldy portion of his force set foot in it. Most probably, too, during the passage he pushed strong detachments along the north-western bank, and held its eastern end with a rearguard until his trains were through.

As it turned out, no attack was made. Whether the Boers missed their opportunity through carelessness or stupidity, or whether the fierce fighting at Talana had daunted them, we do not know. Certain it is that they totally failed to keep touch with the retreating troops, only entering Dundee in the middle of Monday morning, and wasting time there in looting and drinking. The night passed without mishap. Yule started again at 11 p.m., emerged from the defile at daybreak, and crossed Waschbank Spruit at 9.30 on Tuesday morning, having covered sixteen miles of bad roads in ten and a half hours, the worst parts being negotiated in the dark. "The men were tired," writes an officer simply, "but they marched well."

The crossing of the Spruit was a wise precaution, for a thunderstorm soon converted it into an impassable torrent. All the morning the infantry rested, weary, wet, and cold. Their commander's energy was unabated. Hearing the distant thunder of the guns of Rietfontein, he moved westward to White's assistance with the cavalry and two batteries, but after going six miles the sound of the cannonade died away, and he returned to the bivouac. Next morning at 4 a.m. the march was resumed through a rolling country covered with scrub. Sunday's river was crossed in the morning, and early in the afternoon a patrol of the 5th Lancers met the advanced guard. The two parts of the English army were at last in touch. As, however, it was deemed expedient to reach Ladysmith as soon as possible, another night-march of twelve hours was taken. Struggling on over tracks ankle deep in mud and drenched with continuous rain, the column reached the outskirts of the

GENERAL YULE'S COLUMN ON THE ROAD TO LADYSMITH.

town at 6 a.m. on the 26th, and its hardships were over. The troops were badly exhausted, but there had been little straggling, and not a man had been lost during the retreat.

As an example of activity and endurance, the week's work done by the Dundee column is not easily surpassed. During the last four days rather over sixty miles had been covered, under most disheartening conditions. Beaten troops, as is well known, will, like

THE CHURCHYARD OF DUNDEE WHERE GENERAL SYMONS IS BURIED.

wounded animals, travel long distances. But these men were not beaten, and they had with them a considerable baggage train. Of the eighty-one hours during which the retreat continued they had been on their legs over forty. The average pace of one and a half miles per hour is a significant comment upon the wearisome nature of the movement and the difficulties that had to be overcome. The whole operation reflected the highest credit upon the resolution and

judgment of General Yule and his subordinates, and not a little of the success was due to Colonel Dartnell, of the Natal Police, whose local knowledge was of immense value.

So ends the story of the Dundee column, at once so glorious and so tragic. The first Commander died in Boer hands on the day that Yule's outposts joined hands with the troops at Ladysmith. He lived long enough to know that his services were gratefully acknowledged by his country and to receive promotion for distinguished service in the field. Nor was the honour undeserved. Whatever share he had—and we cannot but recognise that it was a considerable share—in the injudicious occupation of Glencoe, no one will refuse to admit that in the moment of danger and uncertainty General Symons showed all the best qualities of a soldier. If his over-confidence endangered his men, his trust in their bravery and his own bold and skilful dispositions averted the peril, and to the moral effect of his blow must in part be ascribed the feebleness of the Boer pursuit and the ultimate safety of the column. He was buried near Dundee, friends and foes alike following his coffin and paying a silent tribute to the nobleness of his nature and the daring of his soldiership. The distinguished and chivalrous commander of the enemy's army himself sent Lady Symons a message remarkable for its grave and sympathetic character. But her husband's fame, brightened though it is by the striking and generous appreciation of his country's worthiest enemy, rests on a more lasting pedestal. He will be remembered, if not as the founder, at least as the establisher, of the reputation of British Arms in South Africa.

CHAPTER IV

ELANDSLAAGTE

THE SKIRMISH AT ACTON HOMES—THE TRAIN HELD UP AT ELANDSLAAGTE—THE RECONNAISSANCE OF THE 20TH TOWARDS ELANDSLAAGTE—THE MORNING OF THE 21ST—THE ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS—ENEMY'S POSITION—THE FRONTAL FEINT—PROGRESS OF THE FLANK ATTACK—STORMING OF THE KOPJE—THE WHITE FLAG INCIDENT—ROUT OF THE BOERS—LOSSES OF BOTH SIDES—CHARACTER AND RESULT OF THE FIGHT

WHILE our Northern Column was struggling for existence near Dundee, the other half of the great stream of attack appeared to be fast setting towards Ladysmith. It was on the 18th that the first collision of any importance took place. It came from the direction of the Drakensberg Passes and seemed to herald an immediate attack upon the town. Since the outbreak of hostilities the Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Carabineers had been restlessly watching for the advance of the Free Staters, and on the Wednesday morning their patrols came in contact with superior forces on the line of Bester's Station and Acton Homes. Throughout the day the fighting was continuous, quickening occasionally into heavy bursts of firing at close range, and again sinking into a few dropping shots. The Carabineers, about 200 strong, were hardly pressed round Besters and forced to abandon their stores, though their only casualty was Lieutenant Gallway, who was wounded. On their left the Border Mounted Rifles sustained an arduous but successful combat against swarms of Boers, numbering from 1,000 to 2,000 strong, who constantly occupied them in front with rifle fire and pressed in upon their flanks and towards their rear. But the enemy's shooting was wild and innocuous, and our light horsemen held their own gallantly, showing themselves more than equal to their

opponents and inflicting some loss and several rebuffs. Indeed the whole skirmish was of a nature calculated to give confidence to the Natal troops. It is said that their orders were to draw the enemy within striking distance of General White, but if that were their object it failed, for the Boers tried similar tactics and refused to be enticed. At nightfall, however, finding his rear threatened from Bester's, Major Rethman fell back, and, making a long *détour* to the south, reached the town early on the morning of the 19th. His men, like the Carabineers, had gone without food for twenty-four hours, and had been constantly on the alert for three days and two nights. The Boers, still following the policy of non-committal referred to in the last chapter, did not come beyond Dewdrop and Bester's. The game was to develop from another side, and one apparently unsuspected by the British General.

A little after midday on the 19th it was known in Ladysmith that a train carrying stores and cattle for Symons's troops had been stopped at Elandslaagte, fifteen miles to the north-east, and that an earlier one had only escaped through the decision of the engine-driver. Sir George White does not seem to have attached any immediate importance to the news, for it was not till next morning, the day of Talana Hill, that he pushed a reconnaissance towards the threatened point under Major-General French. The mixed force under that officer's command did not leave Ladysmith till 11 a.m., and the infantry and artillery halted after less than five miles had been covered, leaving the 5th Lancers to move on and collect intelligence.

Few Boers were seen until a point one mile south of Modder Spruit was reached, when a body came in view to the north, beyond artillery range. A squadron was sent out, and returned with four prisoners, having ascertained that the enemy were in force behind Elandslaagte Station. No attempt was made to molest them, and the troops leisurely returned to Ladysmith.

There were still some hours of daylight in which much might have been learnt had the advanced patrols been pushed a few miles further. On the west the Free Staters were showing no signs of activity sufficient to justify a sudden concentration of the English forces near the town. At first sight, then, it would appear that reinforce-

VAN REENEN'S PASS IN THE DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS.

ments of artillery and horsemen should have been despatched to locate the enemy and more accurately to ascertain his strength. But the only available mounted reserves, the Natal Carabineers and the Border Rifles, were seven or eight miles behind, and very possibly, owing to their exertions of the previous days, in no condition to undertake any extended operation. Such being the circumstances the Lancers must be judged to have acted wisely in not going too far. Had sufficient forces been at hand, French might have been spared the reconnaissance of the next morning, and so begun his attack earlier and done more damage to the enemy in the pursuit.

The Boers whose outposts had been disturbed were Viljoen and Koch's Pretoria-Johannesburg Commando, 1,250 strong, which had crossed the Biggarsberg by the western road. It included Schiel's artillerymen with three Maxim-Nordenfeldt quick-firers, throwing a 12½-lb. shell and possessing a greater range than our 15-lb. field guns. As happened on more than one occasion during the earlier part of the campaign, the Boer leading was much at fault. Beyond ransacking the captured train little or nothing was done during the evening of the 19th and the morning of the 20th. Viljoen did not get into touch with the Free Staters near Bester's, and his small forces remained isolated and motionless. Looting, that curse which weighs so heavily on irregulars, had shaken the burgher discipline, and the outpost duty was insufficiently performed. The events that led up to Elandslaagte and the battle itself are an instructive illustration of the weak points of the enemy.

The belief of the British Headquarters on the morning of Saturday, October 21st, was that the Boers were at Elandslaagte in no considerable strength. But as it was important to prevent their effecting a permanent lodgment upon the railway, French, who was temporarily commanding the cavalry of the Natal Field Force, was ordered to start by road at 4 a.m., taking with him five squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Field Battery. He was to be followed two hours later by four companies of the Manchester battalion, together with special companies to repair the railway and the telegraph line. About 8.30 a.m. the artillery reached the ridge which lies south-east of the

GENERAL SIR GEORGE STEWART WHITE, V.C., G.C.I.E., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.

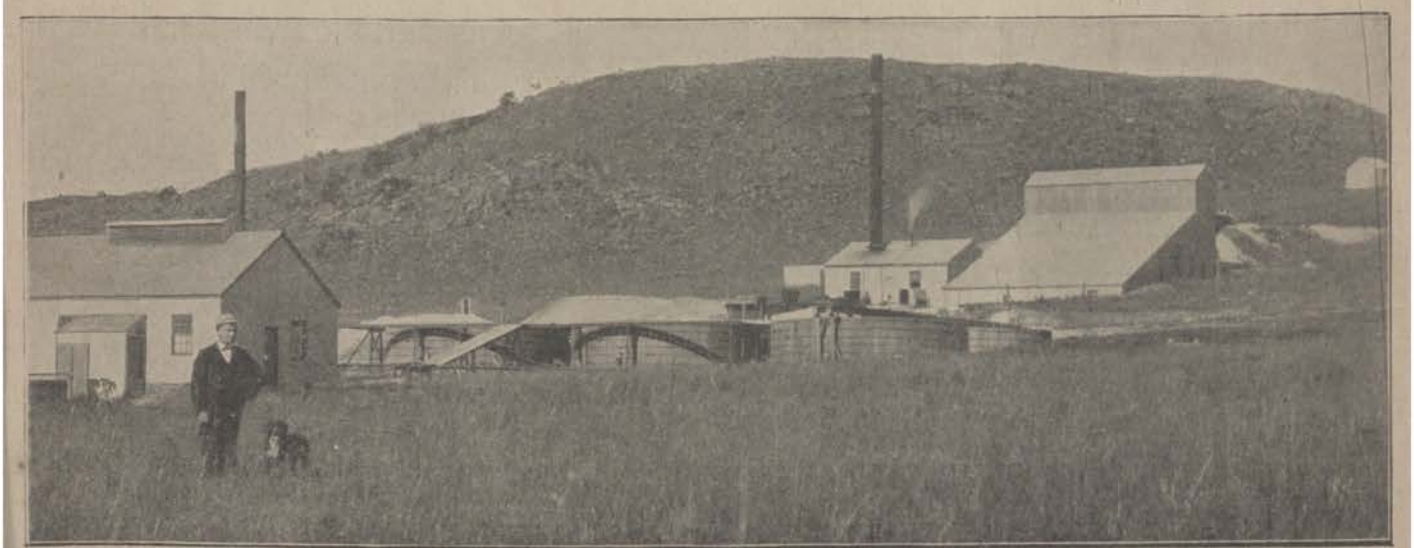
railway between Modder Spruit and Elandslaagte ("the Eland's hollow"). The guns actually approached undiscovered to within 1,900 yards of the station buildings, and taking position on a bluff, threw two shells into the sheds. Out swarmed the Boers, and running to their horses, galloped wildly towards a commanding group of hills one mile to the south-east. Before another shot could be fired the more distant enemy had replied, two shells dropping in quick succession close to the battery. They came from two quick-firers posted low down on the above-mentioned hills, visible only by the flash against the dark background.

Whatever the carelessness of their scouts, the Boer gunners were quick to utilise the superiority of their weapons. At a range of over 4,000 yards their aim was very accurate and their fire swift and sustained. Although a large proportion of the percussion shells either failed to burst or only threw mud about, it soon became clear that the position was untenable. The Natal muzzle-loading seven-pounders had neither the range nor the rapidity of fire necessary to cope with the hostile guns. Leaving an ammunition waggon disabled on the top of the plateau, the whole advanced force was withdrawn to Modder Spruit. As the troops fell back, a detached body of Boer riflemen galloped forward towards the British right and began to steal round towards the rear; but they were too late to effect this, and contented themselves with occupying the ridge just deserted by the Natal battery.

Reinforcements were at once telephoned for. Two squadrons of the 5th Lancers, one of the 5th Dragoon Guards, one of the Natal Mounted Rifles, and the 42nd and 21st Field Batteries were sent by road; the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment and five companies of the 2nd Gordons came by rail, a striking proof of the value of railway communication, even up to the very edge of the battle-field.

The Lancers and the 42nd Battery were the first to arrive and the first to be utilised. The former started off by troops, one moving westward to watch the neks towards Bester's and to signal any movement upon that flank, another to the north-east towards the point where the railway turns sharply to the eastward, and another due

east towards the ridge French had evacuated earlier in the day. The squadron of Dragoons, advancing to the foot of one of the western passes, suddenly came under a violent but ineffective fire, poured on them by a machine gun, but they were extricated with little loss by the 42nd Battery, stationed about a mile and a half beyond Modder Spruit, which promptly swung to the left, and with four well-directed shells drove away the hostile detachment. Before the main body of our infantry had arrived the Boers had fallen back towards Elandslaagte, and Viljoen and Koch remained henceforth in ignorance of our



VIEW OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

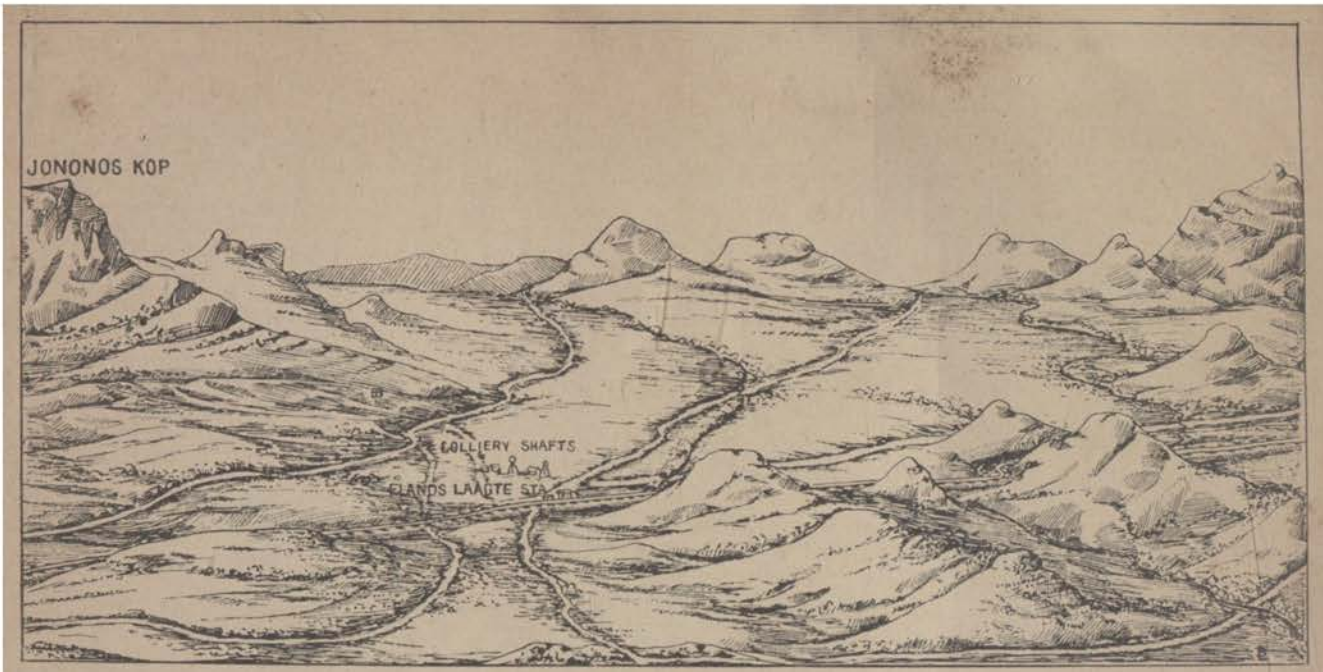
strength and plans until the whole of French's troops appeared on the battlefield and the action had fairly begun.

These preliminary operations were over early in the afternoon. The Gordons and Devons detrained a mile north-east of Modder Spruit, and by half-past two the entire force was steadily advancing. The Dragoons, the Mounted Rifles, and one squadron of Lancers pushed forward on the left, partly towards Elandslaagte, partly towards the western hills; the other Lancer squadron moved up the ridge south-east of the railway, driving back such Boers

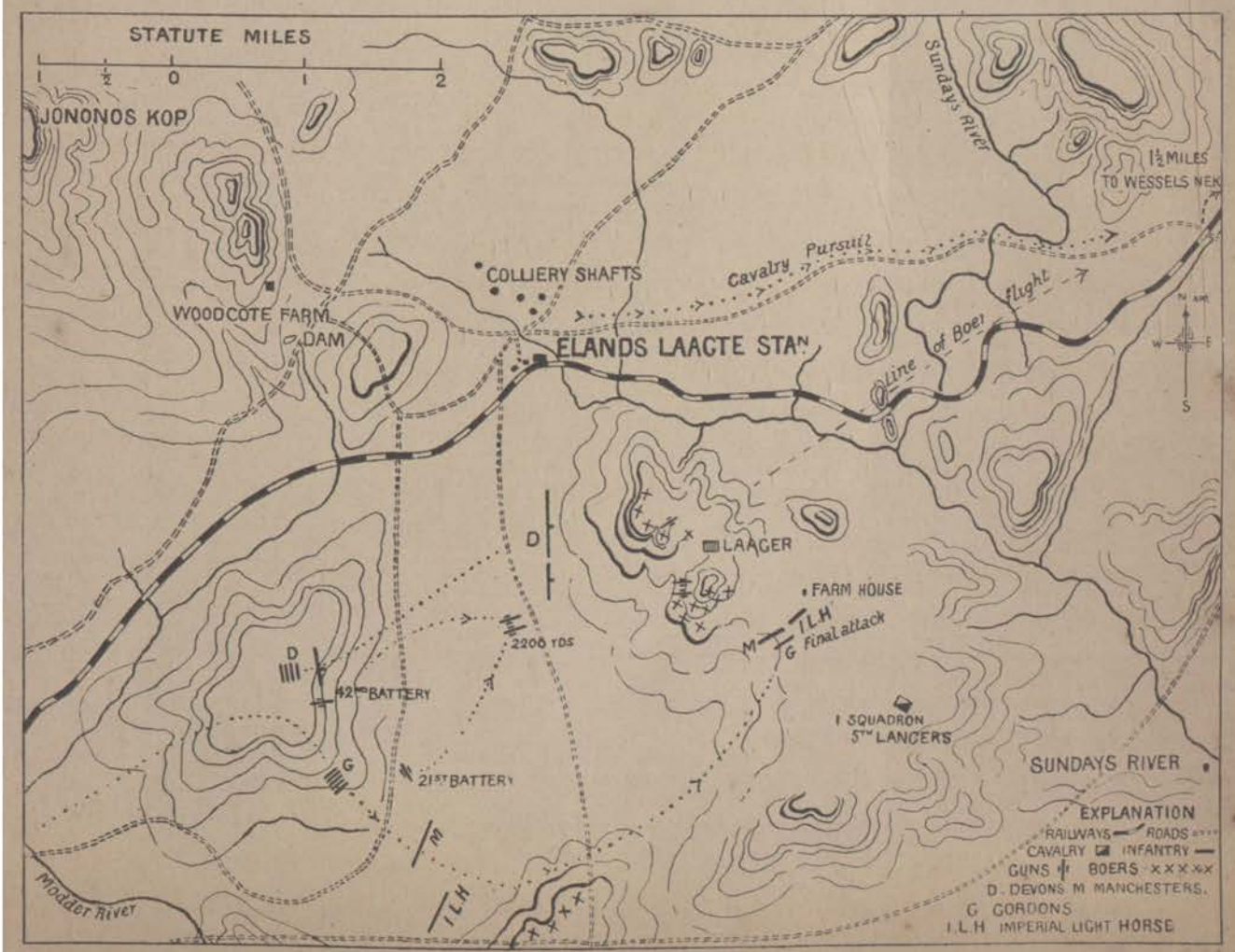
as they met and co-operating with the Imperial Light Horse, who, under their gallant and beloved Colonel, Scott-Chisholme, had for some time been occupied in clearing a succession of kopjes further to the right. The rattle of small-arms was soon deepened by the boom of artillery, the Boer gunners shelling the Lancers as they appeared on the crest. But, widely extended, the horsemen suffered little, and by half-past three had cleared a position for the batteries and infantry who were following them.

The hills taken up by the Boers were now clearly visible. Between them and the ridge about to be occupied by our troops stretched an irregular hollow between 4,000 and 5,000 yards in width. It was intercepted by various subordinate rises, in some parts offering fairly effective cover, in others flat and bare of everything but ant-hills. On the left front was Elandslaagte station, and 2,000 yards south-east of this point, nearly at right angles to the railway, rose the main ridge held by the enemy. It consisted of a high kopje at its northernmost end, which was connected by a nek to a long hog's-back running about 1,200 yards to the south and curving round towards the British ridge till it sunk into the plain some two miles east of our first artillery position. The northern kopje was 800 feet above the railway, and fell abruptly to the nek on which the Boer laager was placed. The hog's-back rose sharply to the south, its highest point overlooking the camp and then lowering into a fairly even ridge averaging some 600 yards in breadth. This was crossed diagonally by several slight bouldered eminences which formed successive lines of defence to a force covering the camp. Its loftiest or northern extremity commanded the whole crest except where the piles of rock hid from view the ground immediately behind them. After the turn to the westward, *i.e.*, towards the extreme right of the British ridge, the ground sank rapidly into the surrounding plain.

The Boers had massed their main strength on the highest part of the hog's-back to the left of their laager. On the forward slope stood two of their quick-firers. Along the abrupt declivities and the crest-line on each side of these guns lay the larger part of their riflemen, snugly ensconsed behind boulders and in roughly-dug trenches.



ELEVATION



ELANDSLAAGTE, OCTOBER 21, 1899.

Towards the southern end of the ridge, where the westward curve began, were other sharpshooters, ready to meet a flank attack from that direction. The high north kopje seems to have been defended by another detachment with a gun.

At 3.30 the 42nd Battery drove into position on the plateau, immediately drawing a sharp and accurate fire from the quick-firers. Shells fell all round the battery, one doing considerable damage as the guns were unlimbered, wounding several horses and men and disabling a waggon. Quickly and steadily the fire was returned, and within six minutes from the commencement the opposing artillery ceased to reply. Just at this moment the 21st Battery came into line, and expelled from the southern end of our position a party of Boers who were endeavouring to annoy our gunners with long-range rifle-fire, and with whom the Imperial Light Horse and some of the Manchesters had already come into collision. The enemy fled, hotly pursued by our shells, and riding partially across our front disappeared behind a shoulder of the hog's-back.

About this time Sir George White rode on to the field, but remained merely a spectator of the engagement, leaving the further conduct of the operations to General French, who lost not a moment in putting his plan into execution. Our infantry were now fast coming up. The Devons with three companies extended on a front of 500 yards, and with the five remaining following in column, the last of these 1,300 yards behind the firing-line, passed to the left of the 42nd Battery and pressed down into the plain, the whole battalion advancing with perfect regularity under a heavy though generally innocuous rain of shrapnel. Their orders were to hold the Boers in front until the main attack had fairly fastened upon their left. The Lancers and Dragoons were to intercept the fugitives as they broke away to the northward.

The Manchesters were ordered, as soon as the enemy's guns were silenced, to work round the horse-shoe ridge, and supported by the Gordons, at first nearly a mile in rear, and still further to the right by the Imperial Light Horse, to fall upon the left flank and rear to the Boer position. The squadron of Lancers, who had cleared the ridge

THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

for the artillery, were already far to the south ready to co-operate in the pursuit.

As the troops advanced the artillery fire redoubled. Though the enemy could not maintain the contest against guns more numerous and better served, they made every effort to keep their pieces in action, generally directing their aim against the infantry. Several times driven from their guns, they as constantly returned, taking advantage of every lull, and drawing upon themselves the brunt of the opposing cannonade, thereby saving their own infantry. The scene was now weird in the extreme. "A huge bank of thunder-cloud," wrote the *Times* correspondent, "formed a background to the Dutch position—one dense pall of cloud fringed with the grey of a setting sun. So dark was this background that every puff of bursting shrapnel showed distinctly to the naked eye. Ever and anon a blinding crash would momentarily chase the gloom away, causing the saw-edged limits of the ridge to stand out clear and sharp against the evening sky. The detonation of the guns and crashing of the galloping waggons seemed in harmony with the peals of thunder which at periods dwarfed the din of battle." Amidst such a war of the elements, our men hurried forward across the fast darkening veldt.

"The skirts of battle," to use Napier's fine expression, were spread wide, and bore eloquent testimony to the changes wrought by modern arms. On a front as great as that filled by Wellington's line at Waterloo, and in a country as stern and craggy as those famous positions that look down upon the Bidassoa, loose undulating lines of men, little more than 2,000 in all, were sweeping on to the assault. Between the right of the Devons and the left of the Manchesters extended full a thousand yards, yet no danger arose out of that wide interval, for the enemy dared not push forward under the rifles of the two battalions and the British guns, two and a half miles in the rear, held the defence chained to the rocks with a girdle of fire. Those grey-brown streaks, gliding on swiftly and smoothly, held within themselves the power to crush with a wide-ranging torrent of lead whatever descended into the plain, and to hold back as with an invisible barrier any seeking to come to close quarters. Thus firmly

confident the infantry moved forward, their advance marked by the quick flash of their volleys which grew brighter and more frequent as evening drew on.

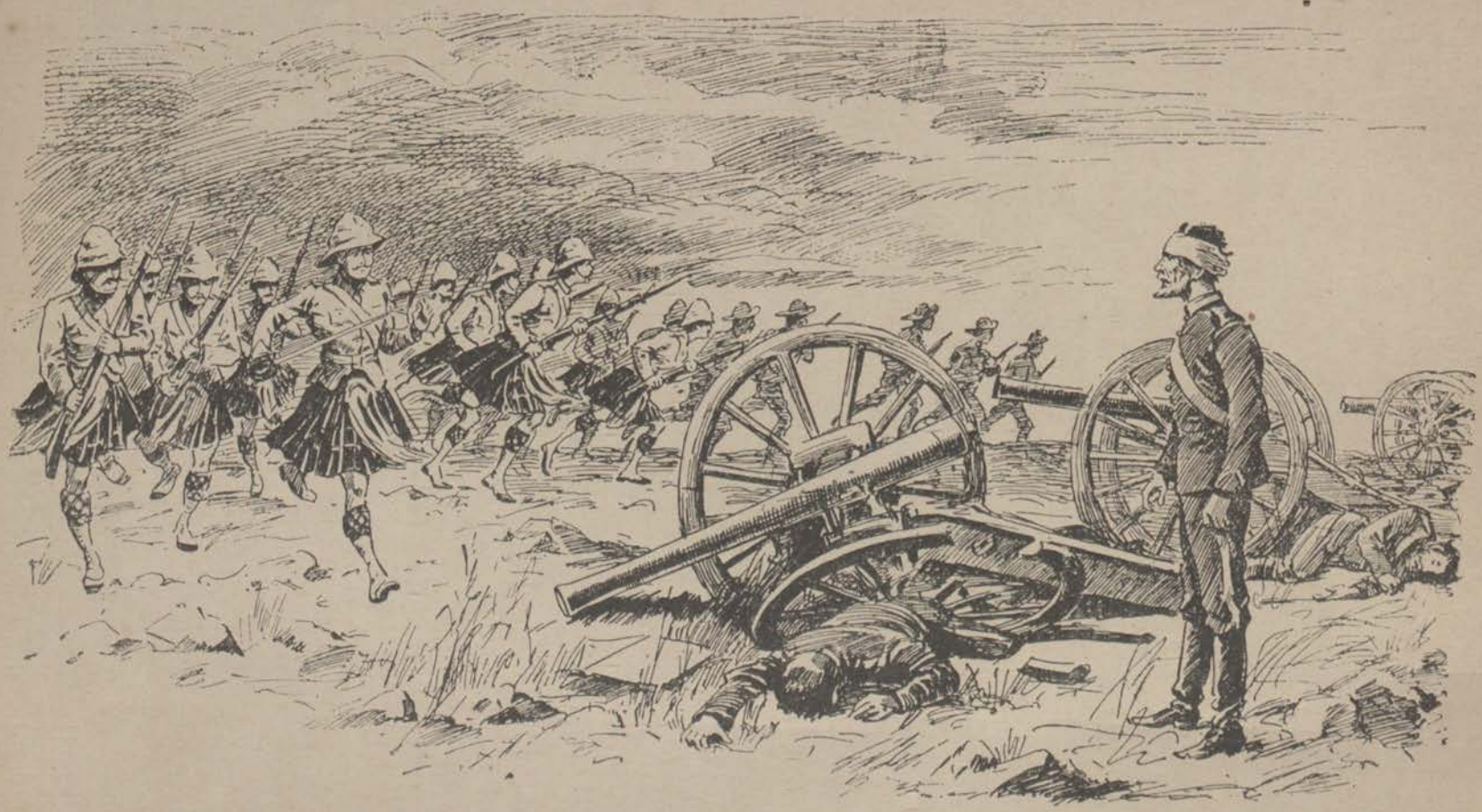
The Devons came first within range of the Mausers. At 1,200 yards from the Boer position the whole battalion was extended, its centre facing the enemy's laager on the nek, the left the high kopje, the right the northern end of the hog's-back. Then the advance was resumed under a fire that rapidly grew in weight and precision. Men began to fall fast; but the movement was executed in faultless order, and, some time after five o'clock, a halt was made about 900 yards from the hill crest. Still in the plain, and sheltered only by ant-heaps, the Devons lay patiently under a driving rush of bullets, drenched with the thunderstorm which had long been impending, and replying with stubborn hardihood to the invisible foe upon the ridges. Till six o'clock they waited, the shells from their own guns whistling over their heads, and the ground about them ploughed with the enemy's shot. Men said afterwards that it was the most trying period of the day, the slight losses of the regiment being due only to the fading light and the dull brown of the khaki uniforms.

Meanwhile the crisis of the fight was fast approaching. The two field batteries had advanced to a range of 3,200 yards, striving their uttermost in the short time that remained to quell the heart of the defenders. The Manchesters and Light Horse, with the Gordons close in support, reached the northern bend of the horse-shoe ridge just as the storm burst. At the same time a body of the enemy upon the higher ground, perhaps the same who had endeavoured to enfilade our right, opened a hot fire. But their resistance was not for long. By the time that the first deluge of rain had passed our infantry were fairly upon the summit ridge, 1,200 yards from the Boer laager. Before them stretched 200 yards of flat ground over which a furious rifle-fire was sweeping. The Reserves were called up; part of the Gordons was thrust into the gap between the Light Horse and Manchesters, and the whole went with a dash at the dangerous table-land. So sudden and well directed was the shower of lead that smote the leading sections as they topped the rise, that for a moment the advance

A Sketch from life
taken 3 hours previous.
to his being Killed.

seemed to pause and gasp, like a man suddenly struck. Then recovering themselves, and cheered by the voice of their officers, the men rushed onwards into the next hollow, "wave upon wave of khaki and tartans," now withering away upon the sky-line and now swiftly disappearing in the dip, until the whole of the troops were over and ordering themselves for the final rush. The halt was only momentary. All the Manchesters, Gordons, and Light Horse were now in the fight, and the elaborate formations of the drill-ground had to give way to the confusion of the moment. "Cease fire! advance!" were the only orders which could be heard or were attended to. With one overmastering impulse the irregular masses bounded out of the hollow, and with bent heads and set teeth addressed themselves to their task. Before them stretched out the long glacis-like ridge, closed by the pile of rocks which formed its highest point, and which was now swarming with the enemy. Full half a mile of ground intervened, strewn with boulders and crossed by wire fences. At this moment the Boer fire grew fiercer, for the enemy had been reinforced by the Germans and Hollanders who had come in from the railway line, and imparted a new vigour to the defence. But the increase of the opposition only quickened the movement of the British, for the success of the assault depended upon its speed and *élan* being maintained.

Splendidly enduring, the various companies advanced in rushes, each flinging itself behind any available shelter, and by rapid volleys striving to keep down the cruel fire that was decimating its comrades. Fences caused momentary, but fatal, checks, men clustering close in getting over and lying thick along the broken wires and posts after the line had passed on. Every minute the losses grew heavier, for neither could the field batteries, now within 2,200 yards of the position, nor the intermittent fire of the infantry, shake the resolution of the Boers. Colonel Scott-Chisholme soon fell, a victim to his own unflinching courage. As he bent to bind the wound of one of his troopers he was shot in the leg, and immediately afterwards in the lung. A third shot pierced his brain as he was being helped to shelter. His last words as he watched the advance of his regiment, "My lads are doing well!" will long be remembered by the gallant troops whom he had trained and led.



THE LAST DEFENDER.

When the Gordons and the Imperial Light Horse finally charged up to the Boer Battery they found only one wounded gunner waiting to receive them; all the rest were dead or fled.

Meanwhile, in the centre of the line, the Gordons, easily distinguishable by their dark tartans, were suffering still more heavily than the Light Horse. Colonel Dick-Cunnyngham was wounded, and the whole track of the advance was strewn with officers and men.

The struggle, in Sir George White's significant words, was bitter and protracted. As the main kopje was neared, the fire abated not a whit in its intensity, and its deadliness was increased by the shortness of the distance. Still the Boers held on—many until our men were within twenty or thirty yards—some dying hard, some running off, some coolly surrendering. Twilight was rapidly setting in as the troops steadied themselves for the storm up the last rocks. Three companies of the Devons had now joined in on the left of the Manchesters, and, in the words of the *Times* correspondent, "the persistent rhythm of their firing lent heart to the flank attack." Bayonets were fixed, and the long shimmers of steel glanced in the weird gleams that lit the interval between the storm and the night. The charge was sounded, and with a last effort the weary infantry flung themselves upon the enemy's stronghold. With a wild cadence of cheering the top of the ridge was won, and the laager appeared within fixed sight range, the slopes that led down to it covered by fugitives. In the centre of the camp itself appeared a white flag, and believing the fight to be over, our men began partly to descend the hill, partly to reform on the crest. Suddenly from a small steep kopje east of the nek came a violent burst of firing, and thirty or forty of the enemy made a resolute up-hill charge. So unexpected was the attack, and so deadly the fusilade, that for a moment the overstrained infantry wavered and ran back behind the crest in confusion.

But the panic died out as fast as it had arisen. Steadied by the bugle-call, the men rallied, and aided by the three companies of Devons, drove back the Boers, who fled without a further effort, leaving their baggage in our hands. Fresh disaster awaited them as they hurried northwards. Our cavalry closed in, and charging three times through them, inflicted sharp punishment, pressing them mercilessly with lance and sabre till night put an end to the pursuit.

With the taking of the enemy's laager the fight of Elandslaagte

came to an end. The high detached kopje, north of the nek had been cleared by five companies of Devons, so that the whole line of the Boer positions was now in our hands. Two guns on the main ridge were captured, together with a large quantity of stores, oxen, mules, and waggons. The British troops had a second time demonstrated their superiority, and Viljoen's commando was completely broken up. His losses were far heavier than Meyer's. According

GENERAL KOCH.

to Dalziel's correspondent[1] at Pretoria, the Boers lost thirty-six killed, 112 wounded, and 201 prisoners; but it is certain that the first item is much under-estimated. Sixty-seven Boers were actually picked up dead on the hills, and the cavalry accounted for about fifty more, lance wounds, it need hardly be said, being terribly efficacious. Probably 150 killed would be nearer the truth, the total loss being between 400 and 500 men, or about a third of the whole. Of those who fell

[1] November 20.

upon the ridges a considerable part were struck by our rifle-fire, while Schiel's artillerymen, who throughout the fight were the special object of our shells, fought their guns heroically, suffered in proportion. Schiel himself was wounded and captured, fifteen out of twenty-three devoted gunners lying dead around him, and General Koch, who is said to have commanded during the day, died of his injuries. He was Minute-keeper to the Executive, and President Kruger's most influential supporter. Commandant Pretorius was wounded, and remained for some months our prisoner. Viljoen was reported to be dead, but escaped. The remnant of his troops retreated by Wessel's Nek, and joined Joubert's main column on the day after the battle.

COLONEL SCHIEL.

Our own losses again showed a mournfully high percentage of officers, thirty-five being killed or wounded out of a grand total of 257, or about one in every seven. The brunt of the casualties was borne by the Gordons. Their conspicuous uniform, a somewhat deeper formation, and the fact that they occupied the centre of the line, and therefore the middle of the deadly table-land, were the causes of the long list. Ninety-seven men and thirteen officers killed and wounded are a heavy toll upon a total of some 500 bayonets. The three other corps who took part in the infantry attack suffered less, the Imperial Light Horse coming next to the Highlanders with over fifty casualties, including ten officers. The Devons, on the other hand, though exposed to the full weight of the enemy's fire before the flank attack developed, lost a bare 5 per cent. The colour of their clothing, the openness of their order, and the pre-occupation of the Boers with the fast approaching flank attack, enabled the regiment to carry out its most important and difficult task with consummate success, and at very slight cost, Major Park handling his men with rare coolness and judgment.

Elandslaagte was the most satisfactory action that we were to fight

for many weeks. The success of the operation was due to the judicious management of General French and to the admirable way in which the three arms co-operated. As at Talana Hill, the artillery soon got the upper hand of the enemy's guns, but the rifle-fire never slackened till the hills were stormed. The effect of the shrapnel was partly neutralised by the rocks and by the extent of ground over which the enemy's sharpshooters were scattered, but the prisoners freely admitted the terrible

THE STATE FUNERAL OF GENERAL JAN KOCH AT PRETORIA, NOVEMBER 2

nature of the fire, saying that nothing could live on the western slopes of the ridge, while a farm-house in its rear was surrounded by mangled horses. Our flank attack became turned into a frontal one, and had to be made along a kind of natural glacis, necessarily at heavy cost. But the blow was rightly aimed, and the temerity of the vanquished in remaining so long after their flank was fairly turned was severely punished.

The strength of their position might well have appeared to justify their confidence, and nothing but the unhesitating devotion of our troops could have brought the attack to a favourable conclusion.

The "white flag" incident does not necessarily prove that there was intentional treachery on the part of the Boer commanders. The men on the eastern kopje need not have seen the token of surrender in the camp, and would naturally have chosen the moment when our troops

COMMANDANT PRETORIUS OUTSIDE THE BOER WARD, WYNBERG HOSPITAL

were disordered by their success to make their counter-stroke. It was Colonel Ian Hamilton, commander of the Infantry Brigade, who first ordered the "cease fire" to be sounded, so that the supposition that our bugle-call was purposely imitated by the enemy appears unfounded. While, however, a general accusation of bad faith seems unjustifiable, the conduct of individual Boers who fired on our troops after they had surrendered merited the strongest reprobation. The numerous cases of this kind of ruse which occurred as the war proceeded are so well-

BOER PRISONERS IN LADYSMITH JAIL

proven, that it would be a mistake to add to them other charges less easy to substantiate. It should be remembered that the confusion and area of a modern battle are so great that it is perfectly easy for one part of a line to continue firing, quite unconscious of the surrender of troops to their right or left. The facts afford no proof that the sudden renewal of the fight at Elandslaagte was due to deliberate treachery.

The night after the battle proved a terrible one for the wounded. A bitter wind and drenching rain froze the limbs of the unfortunate sufferers, while the precipitous ground made discovery and removal a very difficult and tedious process. One officer, whose shoulder had been badly shattered by an elephant gun, was twice dropped by the doolies who were carrying him down the hill. A private passed a great portion of the night in firing his rifle to attract attention. Water on those arid ridges there was none. Those who were still whole wandered about seeking their corps or sunk down exhausted to snatch a little sleep. When day dawned the whole force returned to Ladysmith. Again, as in the case of Talana, the blow could not be followed up. The victory was of the nature of a successful sortie, not an earnest of a rapid initiative. Though Koch and Viljoen had been beaten, direct communication with Symons' force was not reopened. As has been already related, the morning after Elandslaagte General Yule found the Glencoe Pass strongly held, and was obliged to choose the precarious line of retreat across the eastern ridges of Biggarsberg.

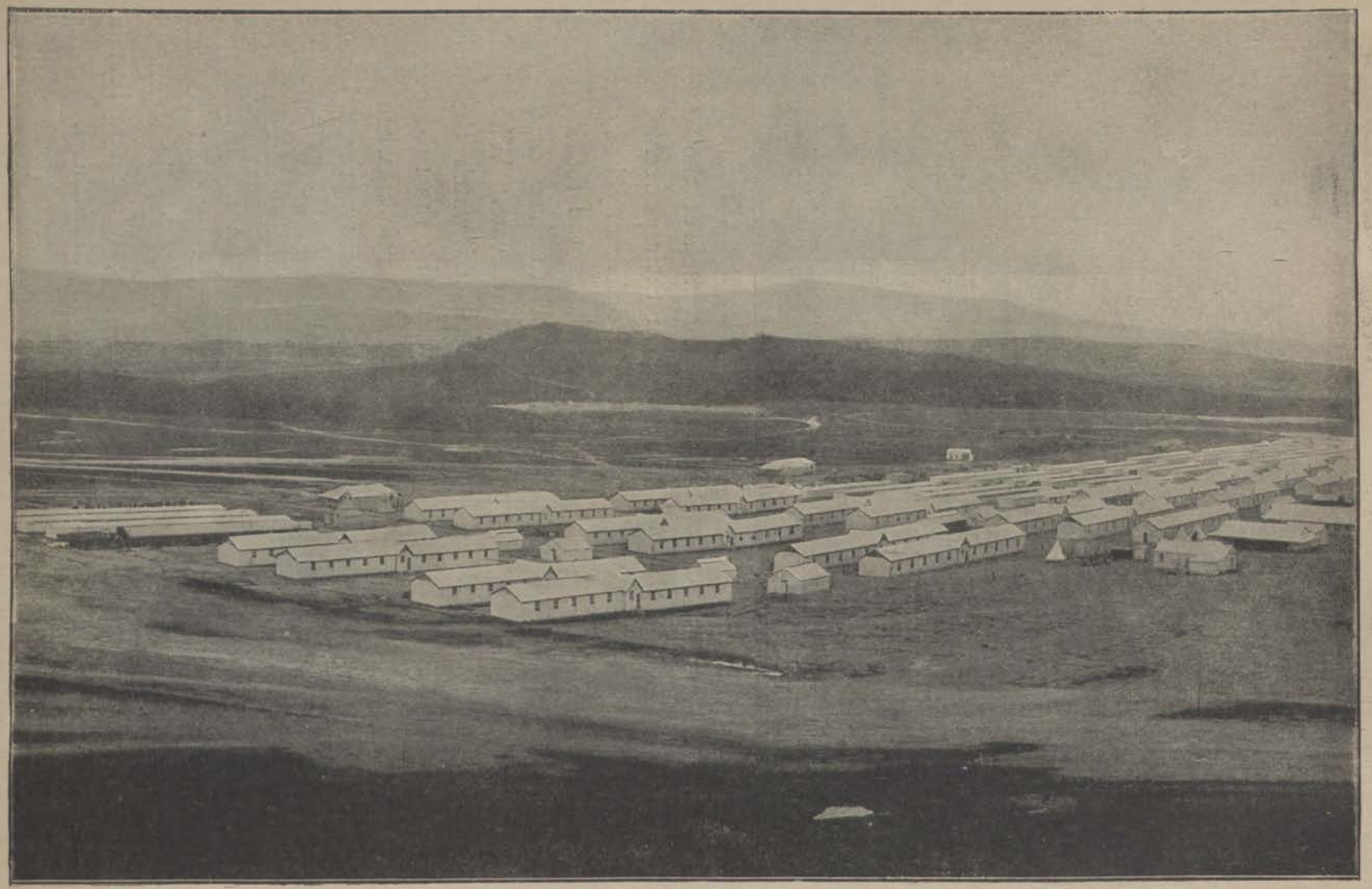
Led to Ladysmith by the threatening attitude of the Free Staters below the Drakensberg, the Commander-in-chief could not go to meet the Dundee column. Not till the retreating force had reached Sunday's River could he reach out a helping hand. Before this took place he had fought yet another engagement to secure the safety of his lieutenant, but he had made up his mind that until the junction was effected he could not engage himself in a general action. Through no fault of his or Yule's, the Boers were allowed to recover from the moral effect of their reverses, and Joubert and the Free Staters were able to advance on Ladysmith unopposed, and so to execute, though without the tactical successes which their strategical advantages seemed to ensure, the converging movement they had originally intended.

CHAPTER V

RIETFONTEIN

WHITE PREPARES TO ASSIST YULE—MOVES OUT ON THE 24TH TOWARDS THE MODDER SPRUIT—BOER POSITIONS ON INTINTANYONE AND MATTOWAN'S KOP—WHITE FACES TO THE LEFT—INFANTRY AND ARTILLERY FIGHT AT LONG RANGE—BOER ATTACK ON ENGLISH LEFT REPULSED—GENERAL RETIREMENT OF BOERS—WHITE, HAVING EFFECTED HIS OBJECT, WITHDRAWS TO LADYSMITH—JUNCTION WITH YULE—FIRST PART OF THE CAMPAIGN OVER

THE Sunday night that saw French's return to Ladysmith witnessed the commencement of Yule's retreat. Owing to the carelessness of the enemy, who had omitted to cut the telegraph wires from Dundee to Greytown, the Headquarters Staff were informed of the movement, and prepared to assist it with all the means in their power. The most effective way of doing this was to attack and defeat any body of Boers who should be in a position to damage or intercept the retiring column. The enemy's plan had now so far developed as to show pretty clearly the directions from which such an attempt would come. With Joubert Yule would have himself to deal, but White could watch the railway as far as Elandslaagte, and prevent any advance by the road over the Biggarsberg against his lieutenant's flank. Therefore, when on the evening of Monday the 23rd it was reported that Boers were on Jonono's Kop, the Commander-in-chief resolved to move out the following day with a force sufficient to deal with any hostile body marching eastward. He had cause to believe that the enemy were Free Staters endeavouring to effect a junction with Joubert, which was an additional reason for promptly assaulting and dispersing them. He had with him the Gloucestershires, the Devons, the Liverpools, and the 2nd battalion of the King's Royal Rifles lately arrived from Maritzburg. French took out a cavalry brigade containing the 19th Hussars, 5th Lancers, the Natal Volunteers, and two squadrons of Imperial Light Horse,



LADYSMITH CAMP, MARCH, 1899

while the artillery consisted of the 53rd and 42nd Field Batteries and the Mountain Battery.

The force which White expected to intercept was a body of Transvaalers who had followed Viljoen's commando, and was composed of veterans eager to wipe out the effect of Elandslaagte and to prove their own superiority to the younger generation. It is not probable that they had any direct designs upon Yule's column, though their

RIETFONTEIN FARMHOUSE

position seems to show that they intended to prevent any reinforcements moving north-west along the Glencoe road to support him. They had seized two lofty hills overlooking the railway, known as Mattowan's Kop and Intintanyone, the culminating heights of a range running west-south-west from a point some two miles west of Modder Spruit Station. The two peaks were about 1,000 yards apart and 1,200 feet high.

Between them, over a nek (800 feet), ran a rough road in the

THE BATTLE OF RIETFONTEIN, OCTOBER 24

direction of Walker's Hoek. From the base of the ridge a tableland extended for about half a mile in the direction of the railway, when it was broken by a lower ridge parallel to the above-mentioned heights, and stretching north-east and south-west for a considerable distance. From the railroad it was easily accessible, but on the side of the hill it fell abruptly to the plateau beneath. Due south of Intintanyone, and nearly a mile from its summit, the flat expanse was narrowed by subordinate kopjes, amongst which lay Rietfontein Farmhouse. The Glencoe Road was within effective artillery range of the central nek on which De Wet, the Boer commander, had placed his two guns, and the crest on either flank were covered with sharpshooters. A few scouts lay hidden amidst the undulating ground, directly overlooking the main route.

French pushed on towards Modder Spruit. It was known that Elandslaagte had been reoccupied by the enemy; probably, indeed, the British General expected an encounter not far from the field of the 21st. The 19th Hussars had nearly reached the Spruit when they were fired on from the kopjes on their left, and smart skirmishing ensued. The infantry and baggage, a long way behind, became the object of the enemy's artillery; shells fell near the Staff, and horses were struck by splinters.

Sir G. White thoroughly grasped the situation. Seeing that the British position was too strong to afford hope of a successful assault, he resolved to confine himself as far as possible to an artillery fire, striking hard enough to prevent the opposing force moving against Yule. The 42nd Battery came promptly into action some two miles South-west of Modder Spruit, and in a few rounds silenced the guns on the nek, whose position was disclosed by the black powder which one of them was using. At the same time the infantry advanced, the Gloucesters on the right, the Liverpools on the left. The Devons halted in reserve, afterwards closing up on the left of the Liverpools, while the Rifles remained near the baggage at the tail of the column, and the two leading battalions lined the lower ridge, where the field and mountain batteries shortly afterwards joined them. The Lancers and Hussars drove several small parties of Boers from the broken

ground below Mattowan's Kop, the 53rd Battery with some well-directed shell considerably accelerating their retreat. On the extreme left the Imperial Light Horse, who had wheeled to the westward early in the day, engaged the enemy in the direction of Rietfontein.

Thus at 8.30 the whole line was in the fight; the artillery in the centre steadily shelling the high crests and the nek, the infantry firing volleys at long range, and the mounted troops skirmishing hotly on the flanks. The hills were now thickly dotted with puffs of smoke, many of the Boers using Martini rifles and black powder, and fighting in their old-fashioned way, lying behind boulders and shooting carefully whenever they fairly sighted an object. The rattle of the musketry was uninterrupted, at times becoming so rapid as to suggest the employment of machine guns. The ranges averaged from 12 to 1,500 yards, a distance at which shrapnel annihilates. But the rocks in some measure sheltered the riflemen, and their entrenched guns were, as usual, bravely fought despite the overwhelming strength of their opponents. Our infantry did not attempt to gain ground, one costly mistake clearly demonstrating the wastefulness of such a course. Either owing to a misunderstanding, or to overeagerness, the Gloucesters crossed the ridge they were holding and endeavoured to descend the reverse slope, all the while fully exposed to the enemy's fire. Probably the latter had the range measured; at any rate their shooting, even at three quarters of a mile away, was deadly. Colonel Wilford was killed, many casualties occurred, and the battalion was again withdrawn behind the sheltering crest with a loss of over forty men killed and wounded.

This took place about 9 a.m. Shortly afterwards, the enemy, encouraged by White's defensive attitude, attempted a vigorous stroke against his left, threatening to cut the force from Ladysmith. But the attack never became serious. The Natal Rifles and Carbineers, who had been in support of the cavalry on the right, were ordered to the threatened point, and the Rifles moving up to the south seized some detached kopjes, thus further strengthening the flank. The Carbineers pushed up to Rietfontein House, driving back everything in front of them and pouring a heavy maxim fire into the fugitives. But the

Boer rarely suffers from panic. The fight was renewed, and though neither side lost or gained ground, the firing was very hot and lasted till eleven o'clock. After this the action slackened. Our heavy shell fire and the steady volleys of our infantry had caused the enemy some loss, and convinced him that nothing was to be gained by prolonging the contest. Shortly after midday some 500 Boers were seen making off towards Bester's, a fact which lends colour to the suggestion that Free Staters actually took part in the fight. By half-past one the infantry fire had ceased, and General White's object had been attained, for he had received news that Yule had reached Waschbank Spruit in safety. It now only remained to withdraw the troops. This movement began from the left, the Rifles and baggage falling back first, slowly followed by the rest of the infantry. The artillery, which continued firing for nearly an hour longer, and the cavalry covered the retirement. The retreat of the latter was neither easy nor safe. The Boers, far from relinquishing their position, had only retired behind the crests, and as soon as they noticed a retrograde movement came quickly forward to harass the rearguard. The English, however, fell back from ridge to ridge, one part covering the withdrawal of another, the enemy following up closely and pouring a heavy fire into the retiring squadrons. There were, however, few casualties, and the whole force retired in safety to Ladysmith.

The British losses were 19 killed and 91 wounded; the Boer losses were set down by natives at 70 killed and 250 wounded. These figures are almost certainly too high. The total force of the enemy probably did not exceed a thousand men, and his position dominated ours. Admitting the superiority of our artillery, the conditions of the fighting do not warrant our ascribing to him a loss superior to that of the British.

Next day Yule came into touch with White's outposts, and the communication, for which Elandslaagte and Rietfontein had been fought, was secured. The first part of the campaign was now over. One of the initial blunders had been retrieved, and thanks to the slowness of the enemy the northern force had safely joined the main body. So far the English commander had been condemned to inaction.

It was now to be seen if with his united force he could prevent the Boers from either investing him in Ladysmith or driving him south of the Tugela. The time had come when he might fairly hope to put in practice the scheme he had long proposed to himself, that of a bold offensive-defensive, of successive strokes swiftly and strongly aimed at an enemy extended along the circumference of a half circle of which his own position formed the centre. The following days were to prove if he was strong enough to accomplish the task, and to decide the fate of the Natal Campaign.

CHAPTER VI

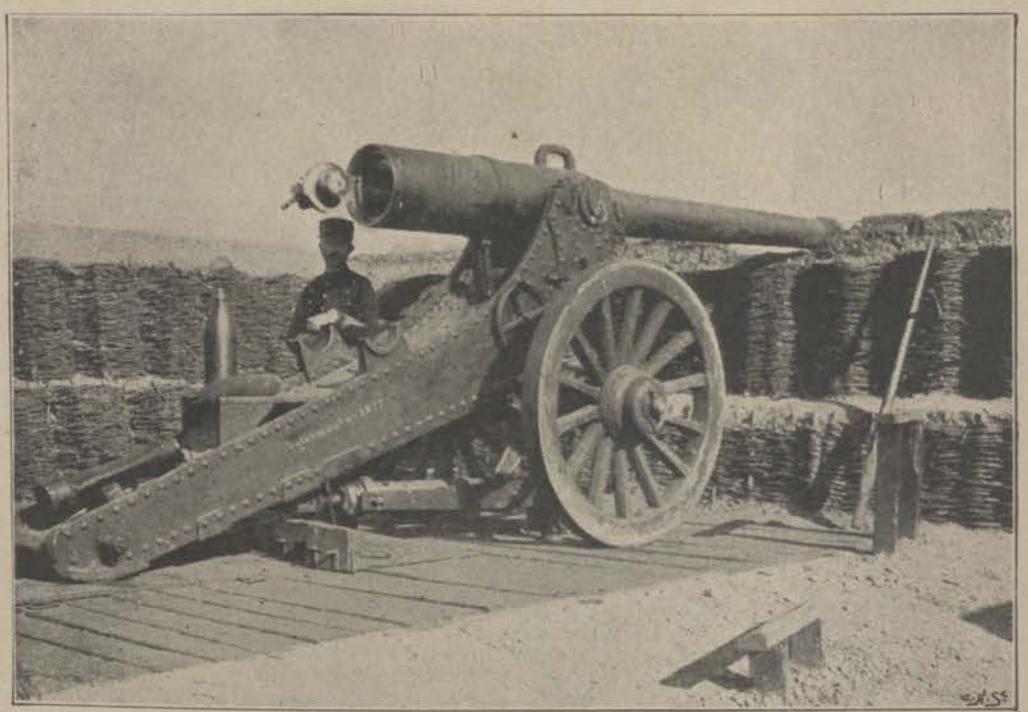
LOMBARD'S KOP

BOERS CONVERGE UPON LADYSMITH — RECONNAISANCE OF 27TH AND 28TH—WHITE'S PLAN FOR THE 30TH — PRELIMINARIES — BOER POSITIONS ON MORNING OF 30TH — BRITISH POSITIONS AT DAWN — BOER ARTILLERY — GRIMWOOD'S ADVANCE — HIS GUNS IN ACTION — SUDDEN DEVELOPMENT OF BOER COUNTER ATTACK AGAINST RIGHT WING — BRITISH ARTILLERY TO THE RESCUE—ORDERS TO RETIRE—CONFUSION OF RIFLE BATTALIONS—ABDY'S BATTERY—GENERAL RETIREMENT TO LADYSMITH—ARRIVAL OF NAVAL BRIGADE—RESULT OF FIGHT.

DURING the three days that followed Rietfontein the Boers gradually closed in on Ladysmith. On the east the corps that had pursued Yule advanced upon Lombard's Kop. It was reported to be seven thousand strong, and to contain Lucas Meyer's troops, together with those of Erasmus, who had gone to the help of the beaten commandant after Talana Hill. The objective of this force appeared to be the railway at Colenso, for it established itself with some guns at Farquhar's Farm and at Dewaal's. As it was within easy reach of the British line of communication, Sir George White naturally wished to deal with it first; so five battalions of infantry, four batteries of field artillery, and all the available cavalry were sent to Lombard's Kop on the 27th under French and Hamilton. The Mounted Infantry were pushed forward in the hopes of drawing the enemy into an engagement, but the attempt failed, and, except for a slight skirmish, everything was quiet. That evening the British troops bivouacked around Lombard's Kop. It was rumoured that a night attack would be tried, but movements of the enemy elsewhere caused Sir George White to recall the force, and during the 28th and 29th the whole returned to camp.

The main attention of the Commander-in-chief was now directed to the north, where the hostile forces were gathering ominously. On

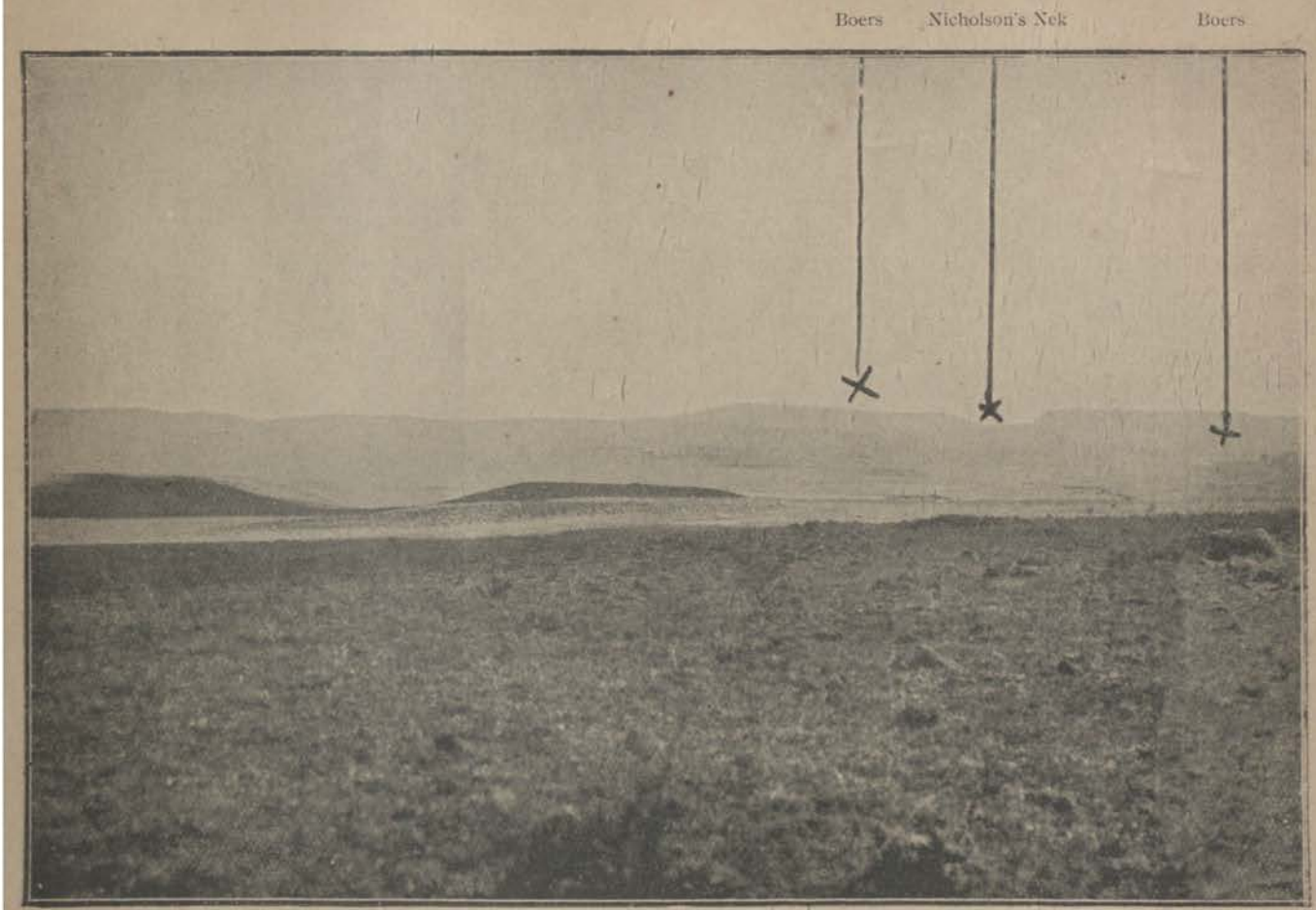
the 28th Joubert came south of Modder Spruit and joined hands with the Free Staters, his main laager taking up a position on the hills south of Mattowan's Kop. Next day the Boers were seen building gun emplacements on Pepworth Hill, 6,000 yards north of the town and some 800 feet above the railway; and their camp was moved into the Rietfontein Hollows close behind the ridge. On the right the Free Staters under Wessels closed in from Acton Homes, though it was stated that they were nowhere in considerable force. On Sunday



A CREUSOT GUN USED AGAINST LADYSMITH

night it was reported that the enemy extended from near Bester's to the east of the Bulwana heights—a semi-circle of close on twenty miles, running at distances varying from four to ten miles of the town. One big gun, at least, could be seen on Pepworth Hill, the long, black muzzle pointing skyward near a group of trees.

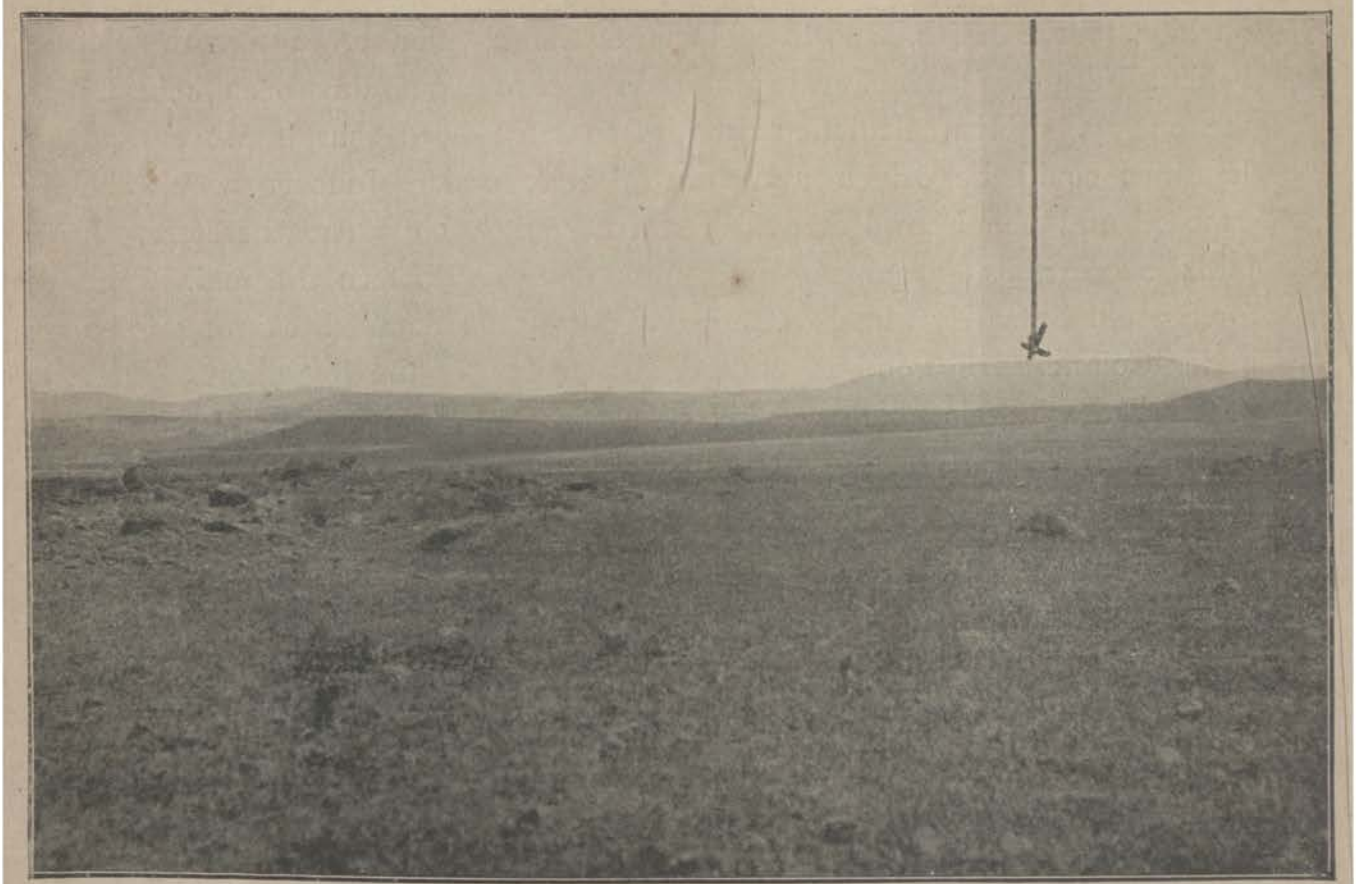
Sir George White had now to choose between the three possible alternatives that are usually offered to the general. He could sit still and risk a bombardment from a superior artillery; he could retreat to Colenso; or he could attack the enemy. If he remained in the town



GENERAL PANORAMA OF THE BATTLE OF LOMBARD'S KOP, OCTOBER 30

he would be surrounded and cut off from the south; he had no heavy ordnance, and affairs might culminate in disaster. He had sent for naval guns, it is true, but they had not arrived, and delay might give the enemy a chance of intercepting them. To retire behind the Tugela without fighting might well have seemed out of the question. According to his own statement he never wished to abandon Ladysmith or to withdraw behind the Tugela, for he believed that in that case his flank would have been turned by superior forces, and Pietermaritzburg and not Ladysmith become the scene of the defence and struggle.[1] He now disposed of eleven battalions—say 8,000 infantry—four cavalry regiments, minus one squadron — say 1,500 horses — six field and one mountain battery, and about 1,000 mounted volunteers, in all between 11,000

[1] Winston Churchill's account in the *Morning Post* written from Durban, March 4, 1900.



GENERAL PANORAMA OF THE BATTLE OF LOMBARD'S KOP, OCTOBER 30TH

and 12,000 men. This was the Natal Field Force, which was expected, both at home and in Africa, to hold its own against any Boer army. Most of the troops had been in action and had fought with credit. Twice had the enemy been driven from so-called impregnable positions. Surely these fine soldiers, concentrated under one leader, could undertake any operation in the face of any obstacles. There seemed a great chance of deciding the campaign and the war. Once badly beaten in front of Ladysmith the main Transvaal army would be incapable of further aggression, and the final blow would be struck deliberately by Sir Redvers Buller at Pretoria. Such considerations rendered the third course, humanly speaking, inevitable. The British General resolved to attack at once with every available man.

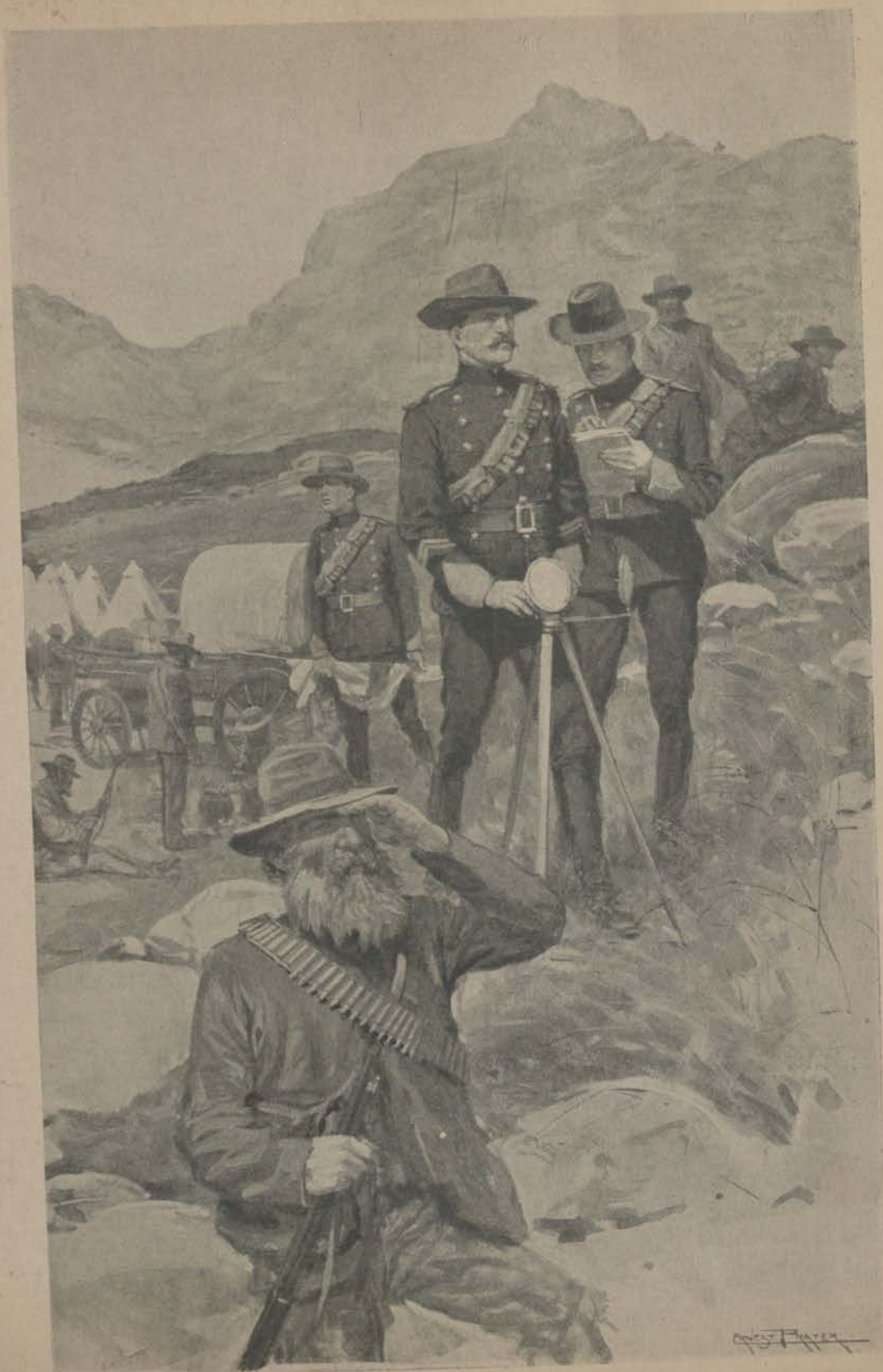
This decision taken, White had to choose his objective and form his plan. As the Boer left at Farquhar's Farm threatened his most vulner-

able point, he determined to "reconnoitre in force the enemy's main position to the north, and, if opportunity should offer, to capture the hill behind Farquhar's Pass, which had on the previous day been held by the enemy." His calculation appears to have been that if Meyer and Erasmus could be driven away the centre, under Joubert, would be exposed and the Pepworth Hill rendered untenable. As, therefore, an initial success at Farquhar's Farm was necessary before the main Boer force could be safely attacked, the British general detailed a strong force under Colonel Grimwood to undertake this part of the operation. That officer had with him his own battalion, the 2nd King's Rifles, the 1st Rifles, the Leicesters, the Liverpools, and probably also the Dublins, Coxhead's brigade Division of R.F.A.,[1] the Natal Volunteer Battery, and French's mounted troops, equal in all to about six cavalry regiments. Meanwhile Hamilton's brigade, consisting of the Devons, Manchesters, and Gordons, with three field batteries[2] under Pickwood, was to hold fast the enemy's centre until his left wing had been beaten. It would then attack the Pepworth Hill in conjunction with Grimwood. Since the main forces of Joubert lay north and east of Ladysmith, and those on the west appeared comparatively negligible quantities, Colonel Carleton, with four and a half companies of the Gloucesters, six companies of the Irish Fusiliers, and the Mountain Battery, was ordered to occupy some position near Nicholson's Nek, and to turn the enemy's flank from that side. The magnitude of the proposed operation is rendered more obvious when we remember that Farquhar's Farm is three miles from Pepworth Hill, and that the latter is nearly the same distance from the hog's-back where Carleton took his stand. From Lombard's Kop to Limit Hill, the points between which the British right and centre were to concentrate, is about two miles, and the range from Limit Hill to Pepworth Hill about 3,500 yards. The country east of Pepworth, which was to be the scene of action, was dominated by guns on that hill.

Grimwood's task was peculiarly difficult, for it rested with him to make the first move, and for some time to bear the brunt of the

[1] 21st, 42nd, 53rd Batteries.

[2] 13th, 67th, 69th.

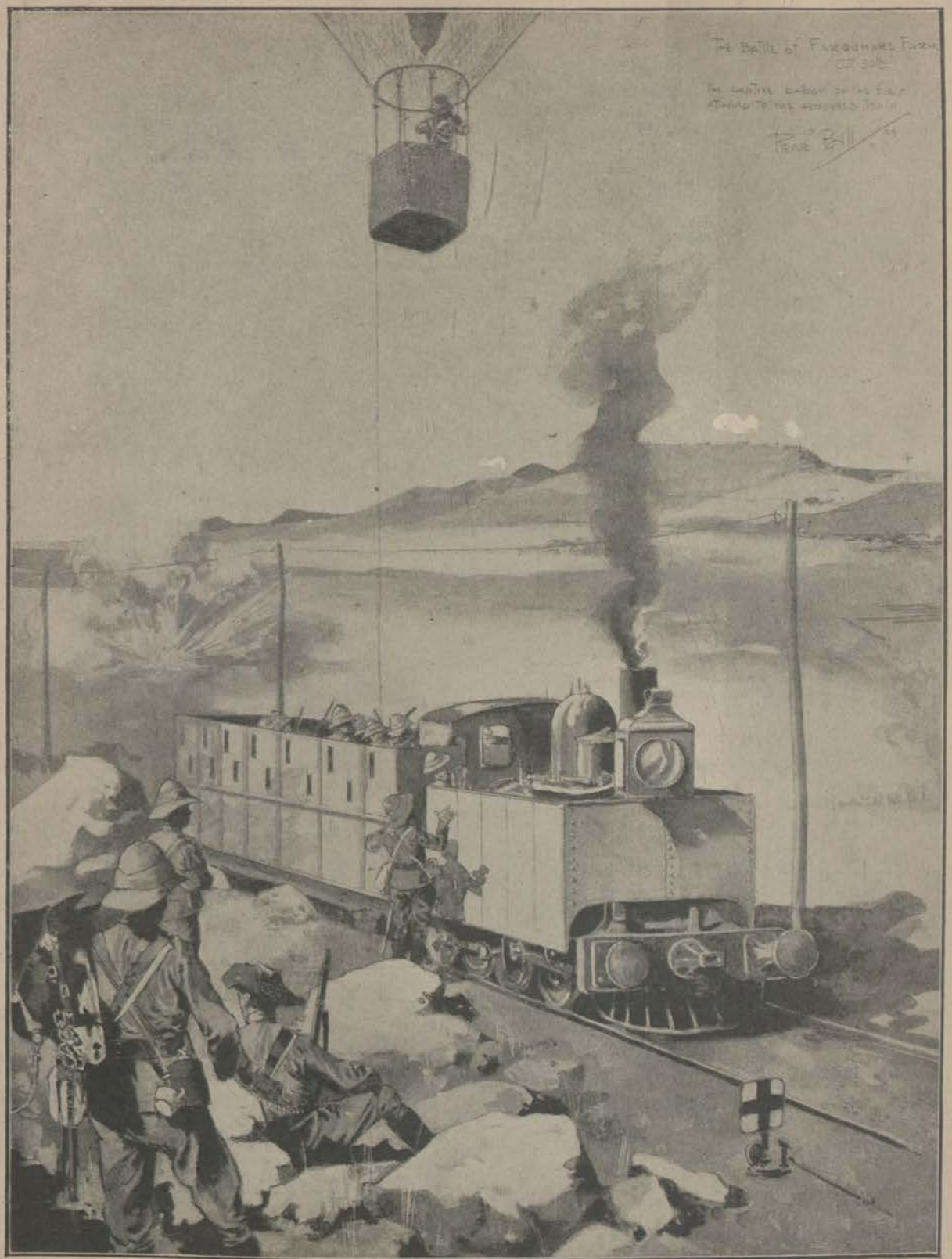


BOERS HELIOGRAPHING

enemy's opposition. Sir George White intended, in Napoleon's phrase, "to envelop the whole of the enemy's system," and this though he stood in the centre of the hostile half-circle with a force outnumbered by two to one. The encumbering wing (the Boer left) had first to be swept away, though even here the attack could only take place under the big gun fire from the enemy's centre. The immense range of modern arms took away the advantages which White's central position appeared to afford, while the encircling tactics adopted were dangerous in view of the smallness of his disposable force and the fact that he had no heavy guns to reply to the Long Tom. Every part of his scheme required faultless execution to ensure the success of the whole, a condition which the numbers of the enemy, actually far greater than was anticipated, and their superior mobility rendered extremely unlikely. If they remained motionless and allowed themselves to be beaten in detail a great English victory might be won, but if they manœuvred strongly against the flanks of White's columns, defeat or even worse might easily result.

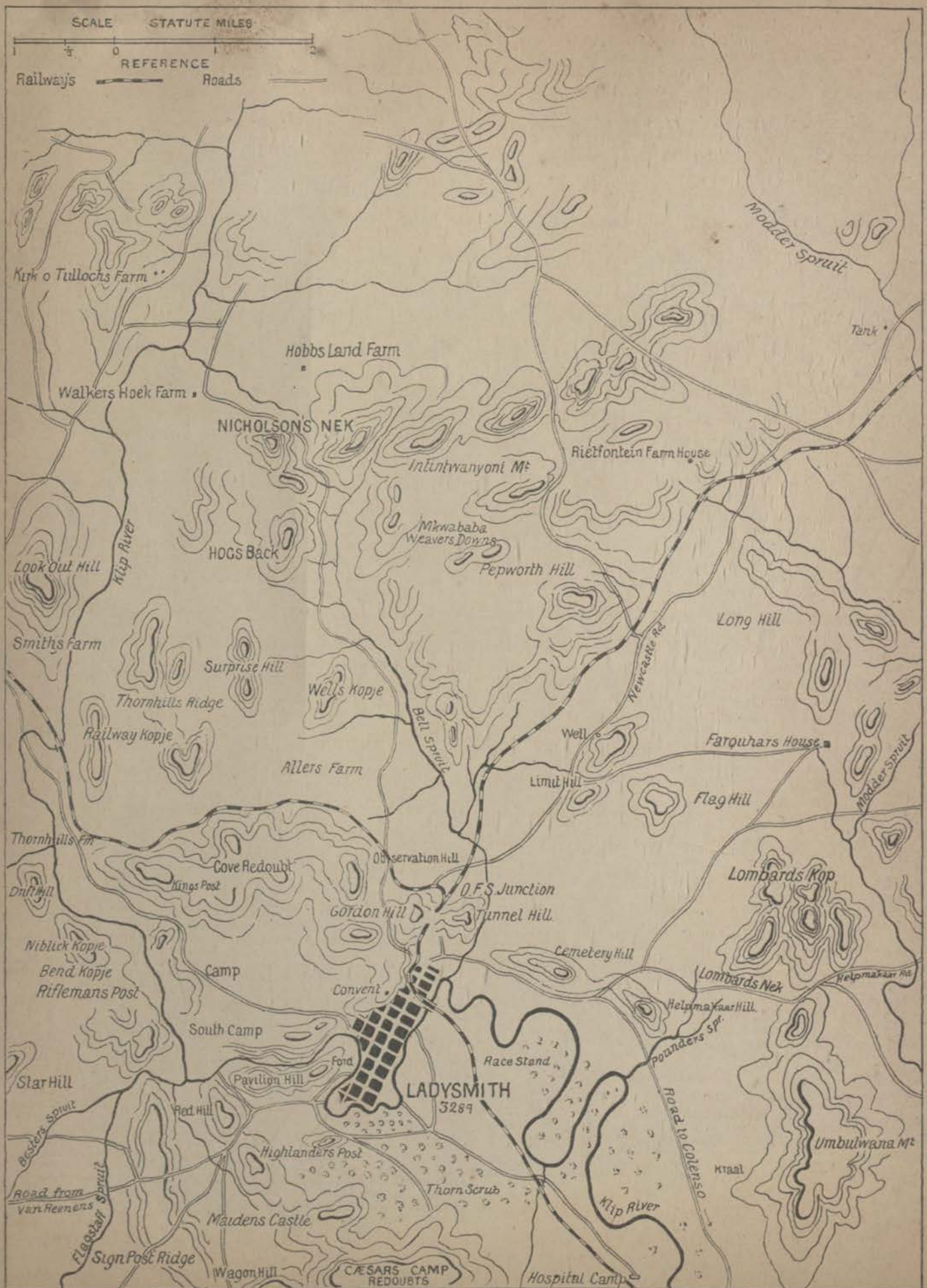
Another grave drawback, which dogged the British throughout the earlier part of the war and which in the present case was practically unavoidable, was the accurate information of our movements possessed by the Boers. If White moved out at daybreak his columns could be seen; if he advanced during the night, spies could frustrate all hopes of surprising the enemy. As secrecy is the essence of successful war, the importance of this cannot be overrated. It was a choice of evils and the English commander determined to take up a preliminary position during the night. The centre (Hamilton and Pickwood) got under cover of Limit Hill, the right (Grimwood and Coxhead) halted on the west of Lombard's Kop, while French closed the approaches to Ladysmith on the east and covered the flank of the infantry. So situated the force awaited the dawn.

As soon as it was light the big guns on Pepworth began shelling the town. Hamilton's brigade behind the hill-crest was well sheltered, and lying low it awaited the development of Grimwood's attack. By five o'clock the latter had brought his artillery into action on a northern spur of Lombard's Kop. The guns vigorously



THE BATTLE OF LOMBARD'S KOP

A Captive Balloon attached to an Armoured Train



LADYSMITH, LOMBARD'S KOP, AND NICHOLSON'S NEK

shelled the hill north of Farquhar's Farm at a range of 3,500 yards, but the Boer battery in that direction was hard to locate, the enemy using a smokeless explosive. The flat top was bare of entrenchments and unoccupied. Under a long-range fire from Pepworth the two Rifle battalions pushed forward, finally lining the low kopjes south of the farm with dismounted Hussars on their right, and the Liverpools and Leicesters in the second line. About this time two squadrons of the unlucky 18th narrowly escaped destruction, a tremendous fire being suddenly poured upon them at short range, but they were smartly withdrawn and escaped with the loss of only one man wounded.

For more than an hour the fight remained stationary. The artillery duel was still undecided, and the rifle fire increased every moment. Ultimately our gunners, guided mostly by the dust thrown up by the recoil of the hidden guns, found the range of the battery north of Farquhar's, and succeeded in silencing it. But the powerful ordnance on Pepworth gave more trouble. In the hope of overpowering it two batteries advanced a thousand yards, but they failed, though they diverted the shells from our infantry, to produce any visible effect upon its fire. The ground around the batteries was ploughed with falling shell, no less than seventeen dropping within the space of fifteen minutes close behind the line. Fortunately the fuses were inferior, many failing to explode, and the contest went on, our artillery unable to silence the carefully-placed battery of the enemy, and the fire of the latter though well aimed doing too little damage to drive us back. But on the whole we seemed to be gaining ground, when towards eight o'clock a sudden change came over the scene.

Large masses of the Boers were seen pouring to either flank, some bound for Nicholson's Nek, others descending the dark flanks of Pepworth and disappearing behind the succeeding ridges. With equal rapidity a tremendous attack was begun upon the right of our line, to the south-east of Farquhar's Farm. Much of what follows is wrapped in obscurity, but it would appear that our batteries in rear of the infantry found themselves unexpectedly taken in flank by shrapnel fire

and had to change front to meet it. At the same time the Rifle battalions were struck by a severe fusilade and, like the guns, had to wheel to the right. The Leicestershires came up on the left of the Rifles, but so heavy was the pressure that Grimwood could scarcely hold his ground, and signalled to Hamilton to reinforce with infantry and guns. The whole scheme of attack had to be given up, and every effort made to support the threatened right.

The enemy strove hard to crumple up Grimwood's infantry. As our troops changed front, a determined onslaught was directed against the exposed flank of the Rifles, the Boers striving to push in between the infantry supports and the artillery behind. With great pluck the 5th Lancers rode up to cover the threatened point, but came unexpectedly under the fire of a 37 mm. quick-firer, and had to retire at a gallop. The moment was critical, but Major Abdy realised the danger, and with rare quickness and decision brought up the 53rd Battery, which dashed into the gap and, with a rapid fire, drove back the enemy, thus gaining time for the infantry to take up fresh positions. Meanwhile Pickwood's artillery had come up. Six field batteries were now in action tearing the surrounding ridges with shrapnel and steadying with their continuous thunder the line of the defence. One battery still replied to the fire from Pepworth, five to the main attack. Nor were their opponents behind them in unflinching courage. They swarmed thickly along each knoll and kopje, their commanders exposing themselves in the heaviest shell-fire, and the men sacrificing their lives recklessly in the endeavour to keep their guns in action. Despite their efforts, however, the brilliant practice of our gunners speedily gained a superiority, and the great onset against our flank came to a standstill.

It was now nine o'clock. The day was cloudless, the sun beating down so hotly that many of the men in the firing line were lying asleep under the low sheltering rock rib that crossed the plain between Pepworth and Lombard's Kop. The scheme of operations had completely failed; would Sir George White press the attack at all hazards with the rest of Grimwood's and Hamilton's brigades and throw French against the deep masses of Boers who still threatened our right? So bold a plan was now

SIR G. WHITE AND STAFF UNDER FIRE AT BATTLE OF LOMBARD'S KOP

impossible. The Rifles were becoming exhausted, the centre had been depleted to support them, only the Devons remaining on Limit Hill. Our artillery were outranged, and our troops outnumbered. The British General ordered a retreat. Leaving the friendly kopjes, Grimwood's infantry entered on the open, and immediately began to suffer from the fire which was now poured in redoubled volume upon them. The battalions, coming into collision with their supports, became huddled and confused; prisoners were taken; and the whole wing reeled suddenly back. On swarmed the Boers, eager to use their momentary advantage. The crisis was instant, for demoralisation spreads fast, and the troops, suffering heavily, could make no effective reply. Once again did our artillery stave off the danger. Like lightning the 13th, 42nd, and 53rd limbered up and, galloping through the intervals of the struggling infantry, covered the retreat. Then ensued a scene never to be forgotten by those who saw it. All the batteries were hard put to it to hold their ground, but Abdy's suffered more than the others. Scarcely had his guns fired a round than an automatic quick-firer opened on them from the flank. "Absolutely exposed," says the *Times* correspondent, "the men stood pluckily to their guns. A section was swung round to meet the cross fire, while the remaining pieces continued to cover the withdrawal of the infantry. . . . Men and horses fell fast, shell after shell burst between the guns, and the little percussion missiles raised a dust about the battery which well-nigh hid the guns from view. But their fire never slackened, and after as severe a half-hour as guns have ever had, the infantry were safe, and covered by the newly-arrived regiments."

Even then the difficulties of the battery were not over. One gun was left behind with a smashed limber and five dead horses, but a fresh team, under Lieutenant Thwaites, dashed into the thick of the fire and saved it. Another gun was overturned in a donga, within 400 yards of the enemy, but Lieutenant Higgins got it righted and returned unhurt. Never did men fight more coolly than the gunners of the 13th and 53rd. As the line retired they fell back alternately, sometimes trotting, sometimes walking, each covering the other's movement and dominating the foe by their close and accurate fire. It was the

BATTLE OF LOMBARD'S KOP

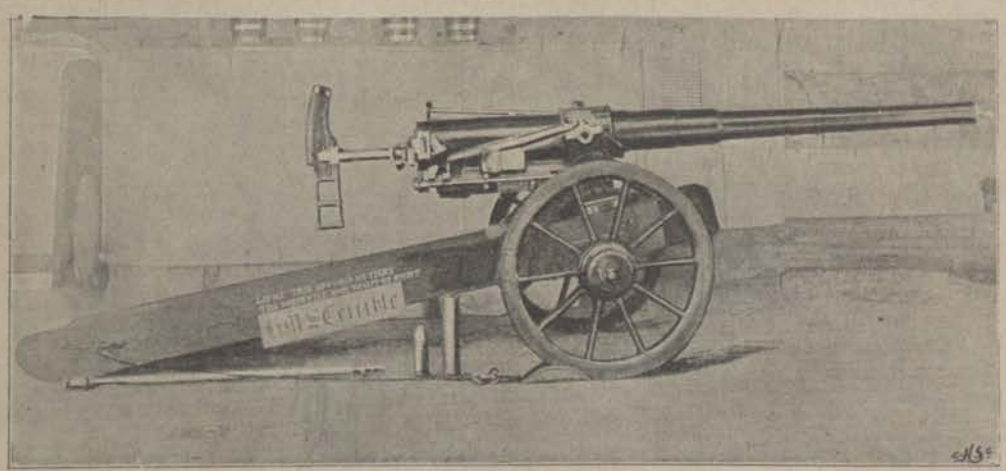
Artillery Racing into Action

action of the artillery alone which saved their comrades from a harassing pursuit.

Slowly the whole force returned to Ladysmith, the Devons forming

A 4·7 GUN ON TEMPORARY PLATFORM

a stubborn rearguard. The confusion in the town was great. "Long Tom" was now steadily pounding the northern front, and crowds of fugitives blocked the way to the railway station, men, women, and children helplessly cowering before the dreadful missiles now bursting at their very doors. The uproar was not lessened by the return of the



A TWELVE-POUNDER ON WHEELS

troops weary and sullen, covered with sweat and dust. The hostile cannonade came nearer and nearer. Suddenly several loud and unfamiliar reports were heard from the direction of the town, and the

THE NAVAL BRIGADE MARCHING THROUGH LADYSMITH

big gun on Pepworth ceased firing. The naval guns had arrived and had silenced the 100-pounder with their fourth shot.

Thanks to the promptness and ingenuity of Captain Percy Scott, of H.M.S. *Terrible*, a wooden carriage had been devised which enabled the long range naval ordnance to be used on shore.

When the news of the retreat from Dundee arrived at Simon's Town, where his ship was lying, that able officer foresaw the possibility of the Boers bringing heavy artillery to bear upon Ladysmith, and prepared some carriages for the long twelve-pounders. Strong baulks were fitted as trails, and a certain mobility imparted by the addition of wheels. On or about October 23rd White telegraphed to Admiral Harris for heavier metal than his 15-lb. field guns. All the experts, with the exception of Captain Scott, judged it impossible to get ready a 4·7 inch gun (45-pounder) in time to go with the *Powerful* on the following day to Durban, but the latter instantly undertook to furnish two with suitable mountings in twelve hours. In eleven they were on board the *Powerful*, together with four twelve-pounders which Scott's foresight had already prepared. The 4·7 mountings differed from those of the twelve-pounders in that they were not provided with wheels. The frame-work consisted of four cross-pieces of timber fourteen feet long by one foot broad and deep securely fastened together; the ordinary shipmounting, with a spindle, was bolted through them to a plate beneath, and the regular carriage dropped over the spindle. Lastly, the gun was placed on the carriage. For use on shore the mounting was placed in a hole fourteen feet square and two feet deep. When the gun was fired the structure moved slightly. It was not cemented down, so that when necessary the whole could be taken to pieces and moved elsewhere.

The guns were put ashore at Durban, and passed a highly successful trial. They reached Ladysmith at 9.30 a.m. with 280 Bluejackets under the command of Captain Lambton on the morning of White's battle, and by 11 a.m. the 12-lb. shells were bursting against the Boer emplacements. In the history of the coming siege we shall have constant occasion to refer to the supreme importance of these weapons, and the eminent services of the gallant men who fought them.

For so extensive an engagement White's losses had been slight, and almost justify his description of the action as a reconnaissance in force. They amounted to a little over 200, of which more than half were borne by the Rifles and Leicesters, these three battalions losing forty-one prisoners besides five officers and ninety men killed and wounded.

CHAPTER VII

NICHOLSON'S NEK

CARLETON'S MARCH—STAMPEDE OF MULES—THE HILL REACHED AND ENTRENCHED—ATTACK OF ENEMY AND SURRENDER OF CARLETON—LOSSES AND REFLECTIONS.

NOTHING had as yet been heard of Carleton's column. When General White sent off his first despatch no special anxiety was felt, it being surmised that the troops would return in the evening. But as the night wore on it became known that the whole force had surrendered to superior forces. The story of the disaster eloquently illustrates the danger of wide and disconnected movements before a superior and mobile enemy.

Colonel Carleton had been ordered to move by Bell's Spruit and to take up some position near Nicholson's Nek or to seize the Nek itself. Here he was to maintain himself until the main movement brought him assistance and enabled him to co-operate against the enemy's flank and rear. His movement, if successful, would have had the further advantage of checking the Boers towards Bester's and separating them from Joubert. The column started on Sunday night at 10.30 p.m. It was unaccompanied by cavalry and consisted of about 900 men exclusive of the "Cape Boys," or half-breds, who led the mules bearing the reserve ammunition for the mountain guns and the infantry. The Royal Irish Fusiliers were in front, the battery and the mules followed, and the half battalion of Gloucesters closed the order of march. Nicholson's Nek lies about six miles from Ladysmith, a distance which in daylight and on a good road could be traversed in about two hours. But the night was dark, the track along the bed of the stream narrow, rough, and steep, and the way unknown. Consequently the movement was very slow, and the foot of the chosen hill,

still some two miles south-east of the pass itself, and on the left of the road, was not reached till 2 a.m. The Fusiliers had already commenced the ascent when some rifle shots were fired above them, and several Boers galloped down amidst clouds of dust and rolling stones. Probably they were only a picquet, for had the enemy known beforehand of this movement, they would have attacked the column when it was enclosed in the defile. The sudden apparition of these few horse-

Photograph by] [*Elliott & Fry*

MOUNTAIN ARTILLERY, A MULE BATTERY

men and the commotion they caused effected more than hours of hard fighting. The great part of the battery mules took fright and broke away, sweeping with them the animals bearing the ammunition. Before any one could realise what was happening, the mischief was done, and the whole reserve supply of shell and cartridges was lost. The panic-stricken beasts dashed into the darkness, the crash of falling boxes breaking with an ominous sound the stillness of the night. Premedi-

tated treachery amongst the drivers there may have been, for they disappeared at the same time. For a while all was confusion. Several men among the Gloucesters were knocked down and hurt, and part were temporarily cut off. When they were got together again they had lost touch with the rest of the column, and orders were given to push on, every one being left to look out for himself. Eventually the Fusiliers were discovered on the hill-top, the leading companies having fixed bayonets at sound of the alarm and rushed the summit, though no resistance seems to have been encountered. Until daylight the men worked at erecting sangers upon the ridge by the light of a feeble moon. The suitable stones were few and the time was very short.

With dawn the position became clearly discernible. The ridge was about a mile long and four hundred yards broad, the Ladysmith end which our troops held being commanded by the other. It resembled Majuba Hill in so far that the slopes were not too steep to be climbed and yet too steep to be effectually swept by fire. Of the battery only two gun trails remained, so that Colonel Carleton had to depend entirely upon the rifles of his infantry. Two companies of the Gloucesters were advanced along the hog's-back: the main body was disposed so as to command the side spurs of the hill, and a reserve of Fusiliers, under Carleton himself, held the rise at the southern end of the plateau.

The Irishmen were still somewhat exhausted by their exertions during the retreat from Dundee, two nights' picquet duty, and the march of the preceding evening, but they had little time for rest. With daylight came the enemy, who opened fire from the hills south and west of the position, but for some hours remained nearly a mile away, the casulties being few. On the right White's battle had begun, and the small force on the ridge listened with eager anxiety to the increasing roar of the cannonade. But as the morning advanced it became evident that the British attack was not gaining ground. The sound of the firing rolled back towards Ladysmith, and large masses of Boers were seen galloping towards the isolated hill on which Carleton lay. There was still time for an orderly retreat, but such

BOER SCOUTS WITH ONE OF THE MOUNTAIN GUNS CAPTURED NEAR NICHOLSON'S NEK

a movement became momentarily more difficult. Possibly, too, the commander did not think himself justified in giving the order, and afterwards it was too late. The Boers seized the northern extremity of the ridge and began to advance in force along it. Others closed in upon the flanks, a merciless storm of bullets sweeping the crest from side to side and end to end, and knocking to pieces the flimsy defences which the men had hastily put together. The losses were continual, while the Boers, making wonderful use of the broken rocks with which the hill was strewn, suffered hardly at all, and made steady progress. According to the best account[1] of the catastrophe they showed no skirmish line, but fired in a deep cloud, some two hundred yards behind the others, the smokeless powder affording no target to their opponents. These are conditions under which the stress of fighting is most overwhelming. The same prevailed at Majuba, and the results were in some sense similar. Our men became worn out, some being with difficulty kept awake in the firing line. Towards half-past eleven two companies of the Irish Fusiliers suddenly fell back; the advanced companies of the Gloucesters retired also. The whole line now gave way, withdrawing to the spot where Colonel Carleton still stood with his reserve. Here the fight was renewed under a fire whose intensity constantly increased. In the words of an officer it was "devilous." The whole force was now ringed in bullets coming from every direction, and the ammunition began to give out. Midday arrived, but still the fight, now fast becoming hopeless, continued. By half-past two the line had become much broken, and the different companies lay scattered and confused upon the plateau, each blazing away whenever the lurking enemy showed himself. Suddenly the rattle of the musketry perceptibly slackened, the order to cease fire was passed along the ranks, and it became known that the white flag had been raised. It was a wounded officer of the Gloucesters who, seeing his men much reduced, and believing himself isolated, had hoisted a towel on the end of a stick. The signal was obeyed by the rest of the force, and the struggle was over, though for some minutes the firing was continued, many eager to expend

[1] Winston Churchill (December 30th, Frere Camp).

their last shot against the triumphant foe, and yielding at last with great reluctance.

As soon as silence reigned along the crest the Boers came up from all sides. Their demeanour was joyous but not insolent, and, with one exception, when a lad called out, "Will you say now that the young Boer cannot shoot?" no disparaging word was spoken. Sympathising with the bitter humiliation of our troops, they busied themselves with alleviating the sufferings of the wounded; some bringing water from the bottom of the hill, and others giving all they carried with them. A messenger was sent to Ladysmith to demand medical assistance, and when all the injured had been attended to, the prisoners were marched to the Boer camps and sent by railway to Pretoria.

So ended this disastrous day, which conclusively proved the great efficiency and numbers of Joubert's army and put an end to all hopes of a successful offensive. The catastrophe of Nicholson's Nek deprived the British General of about a twelfth of his fighting men. About a hundred Fusiliers managed to escape; the rest were captured. Six officers were wounded and thirty-seven were taken uninjured. The Royal Irish lost ten men killed, forty-one wounded, and more than two hundred unwounded prisoners. The Gloucesters, whose advanced companies suffered severely, lost thirty killed, fifty-three wounded, and three hundred and thirty prisoners. The Mountain Battery, the forced spectators of their comrades' defeat, had one man hit and eighty-four taken. Thus the total of those *hors de combat* reached 141, while over 650 fell unhurt into the hands of the victors. The fact that the casualties were nearly one-sixth of the entire force is a sufficient proof of its gallant resistance. As far as the actual fighting was concerned the disaster bore none of the discredit which attaches to the rout of Majuba. There was no panic; indeed it was with considerable difficulty that Major Adye, acting staff officer, could bring the Fusiliers to stop firing. The order to surrender was received by the troops with an obstinate wrath borne of humbled pride, not with the relief of men weighed down with the fear of death.

While it was evident that Carleton's isolation and White's inability to help him were the direct causes of the surrender, several impor-

SIX HUNDRED BRITISH PRISONERS LEAVING THE STATION AT PRETORIA FOR THE RACECOURSE, NOVEMBER 3, 1899

tant points were left unexplained. In the first place, it was naturally asked, how soon was the stampede of the mules known at headquarters and how came it that no steps were taken to replace the lost ammunition? General White referred to the loss of the guns in his despatch written from Ladysmith at the very moment that the column surrendered, viz., 3 p.m. on Monday, but when he first heard of this occurrence is not clear. The flight of the baggage-animals took place at 2 a.m. Carleton would not report to his commander till his troops had got to the top of the hill and the duties requiring his immediate attention had been performed. By nine o'clock the Boers were strong enough and near enough to threaten his retreat, or to intercept waggons moving up Bell Spruit to his assistance. Hence, supposing that a messenger was despatched at 4 a.m., and reached White as late as 5.30 there would have remained three and a half hours for the safe transmission of supplies. Taking into consideration the bad road, delay in sending off the waggons might have resulted in their capture. So much for the supposition that the loss of ammunition was known at headquarters in time to repair the misfortune. If, however, Carleton's messenger was captured or lost his way, and both alternatives are far from improbable, or if, which is very unlikely, he did not send one at all, the responsibility of not supplying him afresh did not rest with any one in Ladysmith.

In the second place, it was very unfortunate that no mounted troops were detailed to keep up the communication between the British centre and the detachment on the left. It was said that the ground was unsuited for cavalry, but certainly the Boers managed to get their ponies about quickly enough, and a force of irregulars would have been of immense value and might have proved the saviours of the infantry.

In the third place, General White made no mention in his despatches of having sent or attempted to send any orders when his own retreat, and consequently that of the left column, became inevitable. It was reported that two Natal Volunteers offered to penetrate to Carleton, but that the service was considered too dangerous and flag-signalling was resorted to instead. If this was so, it is remarkable

that when Sir George White wrote his despatch nearly six hours later he was under no apprehension as regards the fate of the detachment.

It is just possible, if matters had not been hastened by the sudden hoisting of the white flag, that Carleton might have succeeded in breaking through the cordon of his enemies by a desperate bayonet charge. Heavy as his losses would in that case have been, a large part of his men might have got away. The Boers around the hill numbered, according to their own accounts, only 1,200, and the superiority of their fire was due to the fact that it was convergent, while ours was divergent. Could, however, the weight of our force have been brought to bear upon one part of the circle, the enemy would almost certainly have withdrawn from the shock, confining themselves to a flanking fire rather than to a direct resistance. On the other hand, the difficulty of rallying the men for such an effort, and giving a number of disordered and scattered troops already fiercely engaged and worn by long exposure the necessary unity and initiative may well have been beyond human power. And if that were so there was no alternative but the melancholy one of surrender. If the act which closed the struggle was precipitate it was none the less inevitable. Nor did it become men in England to urge that extermination was better than surrender. When, as at Nicholson's Nek, nothing further was to be obtained by dying, heroic counsels from those at home are strangely out of place.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE INVESTMENT OF LADYSMITH

SITUATION OF SIR GEORGE WHITE AFTER NICHOLSON'S NEK—HE RESOLVES TO MAINTAIN HIMSELF IN LADYSMITH—AFTER THE BATTLE—BROCKLEHURST'S RECONNAISSANCE OF NOVEMBER 2ND TOWARDS BESTER'S STATION—FRENCH'S ESCAPE—EVACUATION OF COLENSO—SKIRMISH OF NOVEMBER 3RD NEAR BESTER'S SPRUIT—BROCKLEHURST DRIVES BACK THE ENEMY—EXAGGERATED ACCOUNTS OF THE FIGHT—THE END OF THE FIRST ACT OF THE WAR

THE British General had no longer sufficient men to keep the enemy at arm's length. The first of the three alternatives open to him on the night of Sunday had failed, and he had now only to choose between investment and retreat. The last operation would certainly be one of great difficulty and occasion great loss of stores. Supplies of all kinds, computed of the value of £1,000,000, were heaped up in Ladysmith, and an attempt to withdraw them before a powerful and triumphant enemy would entail great risks and require more time than he could fairly hope would be allowed by the enemy. The same objections, though in a much lesser degree, applied to the retirement of the troops. In any case, a considerable amount of stores would have to accompany the army in order to satisfy its immediate needs, and the march of long columns of waggons through defiles and along a single road would unquestionably cause delay and probably necessitate fierce and exhausting actions on the flanks and rear. Moreover, a siege did not possess the same terrors as it had before the arrival of the naval guns. The excellent practice of the Bluejackets and their evident superiority to the hostile artillery had filled every one with a much-needed confidence. And even these reasons were in the opinion of Sir G. White only supplementary. He regarded the capture of Ladysmith "as an essential feature in the Dutch campaign,"[1] *i.e.*, as

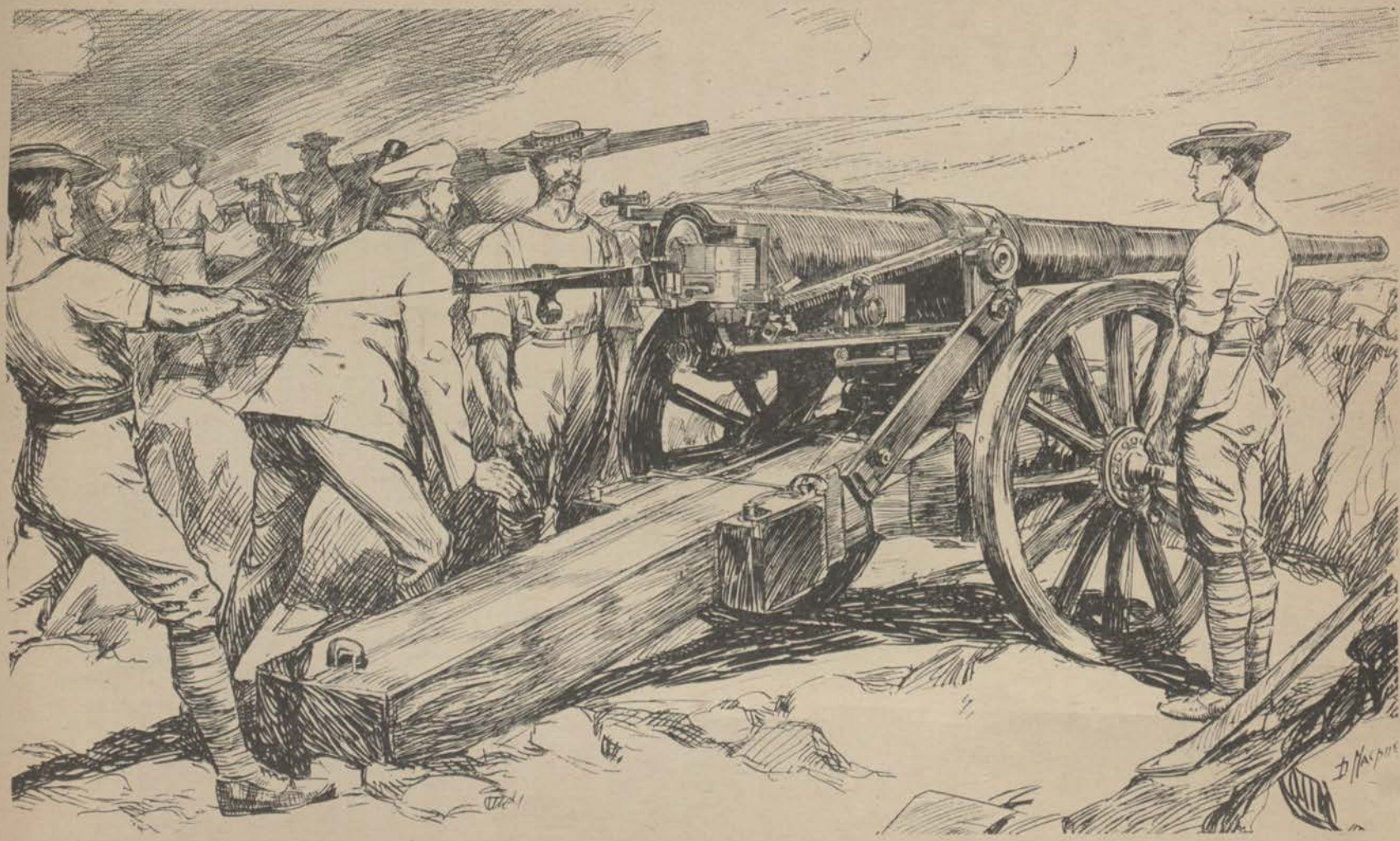
[1] See Winston Churchill, Durban, March 4, 1900.

Pepworth Hill.

LADYSMITH: GENERAL VIEW OF THE BRITISH OUTPOSTS LOOKING NORTH

the base from which the final conquest of Natal was to be begun. Consequently he resolved to hold it until help arrived. It seems clear, too, that he anticipated speedy relief. If he had foreseen what was to happen within a few months on the Tugela, he would hardly have entrusted the safety of Colenso to one battalion of Dublin Fusiliers and the Natal Volunteer Battery. This detachment of a part of his infantry, an arm of which he already possessed too little, would scarcely have been made had he expected the long and desperate strain which was to be thrown upon the remaining battalions. Such a step goes to prove that he expected only a short investment, and believed himself so well able to employ the main army of Joubert round Ladysmith as to prevent him advancing in force across the Tugela. By allowing himself to be invested he would avoid the inevitable dangers of a retreat, and render impossible a general advance of the Boer army into South Natal. The momentous decision was taken, and from the night of October 30th to the advance of Lord Roberts on Kimberley the siege of Ladysmith dominated and weakened the British strategy.

Extensive preparations were soon in progress to strengthen the defences of the town, to collect additional supplies, and to remove all the townsfolk who could lend no active assistance. The day after the battle was spent in despatching trains full of fugitives to the south, the rival guns meanwhile keeping up a steady cannonade from daybreak until past mid-day. Four naval guns were mounted, and succeeded in checking the enemy's fire, though the elaborate emplacements which had now been erected upon Pepworth prevented much material damage. Ambulances were hard at work moving the wounded, especially those who had fallen at Nicholson's Nek. Of Boer losses during the previous days only the vaguest information is forthcoming. The Free Staters who attacked Carleton suffered very little; but the commandos who engaged Grimwood were badly mauled by our shrapnel, and probably had several hundred casualties. The native report that the enemy had lost 70 killed and 200 wounded may be considered a reasonable estimate. At any rate, it was not large enough to affect the environment of the town which was now in progress. But in spite of the numerical superiority of the enemy, Ladysmith was not isolated for two days more.



BLUEJACKETS WORKING THE 4·7 GUNS AT LADYSMITH

Several preliminary actions impeded the completion of the movement, all of which resulted in British successes, and which, as they did not form part of the regular siege operations, have been included in this chapter. November 1st passed quietly. The town was approaching a state of siege. The banks were shut, active commandeering of foodstuffs went on, and bread had already risen to a shilling the loaf. The Dublins were despatched, with the Natal Battery, to Colenso, as it was reported that the enemy were moving towards the Tugela. Next morning the Boer artillery reopened, and it was in returning this fire that Lieutenant Egerton, of the *Powerful*, was mortally wounded, both his legs being shattered. The gallant and promising young officer died in the evening. Meanwhile Brigadier Brocklehurst was sent out to reconnoitre along the Van Reenen road, the direction in which the enemy seemed furthest and weakest. Taking with him the 5th Lancers, the 69th Battery, and some mounted volunteers, he surprised a Free State laager, west of Tatham's Farm, near Bester's Station, and captured about fifty horses, driving the enemy out in great confusion by shell fire, and forcing them to take post on the hills behind. About the same time that the reconnaissance returned to camp, Major-General French left Ladysmith with the last train that crossed the Tugela. Near Pieters Station it was fired on, but no one was hit, and the brilliant cavalry leader hurried south, destined for greater exploits than the area of a besieged town would allow.

Rarely has so much depended on the escape of a train.

That morning the Boers had pressed towards Colenso, opening an ineffectual fire upon the forts. Guns were mounted on Grobler's Kloof, north-west of the town, and throughout the day intermittent shelling went on. But towards evening the attack grew stronger, and to escape capture the town and forts were evacuated in the night, the Durban Light Infantry in Fort Wylie being hard pressed, and only brought off by the timely help of a detachment of Dublins. One volunteer swam the river under a heavy fire, avoiding the bullets by repeated diving. A nine-pounder gun, the carriage of which had been smashed in descending a hill during the withdrawal, was carried off bodily by its gallant detachment. The little force retired on Estcourt, leaving the

GENERAL FRENCH'S ESCAPE FROM LADYSMITH: THE ATTACK ON THE TRAIN NEAR COLENSO

bridge at the disposal of the enemy. The same day the Boers cut the Ladysmith telegraph wires, and direct communication with the outside world was at an end.

The last engagement fairly fought in the open field was that of Friday, November 3rd.

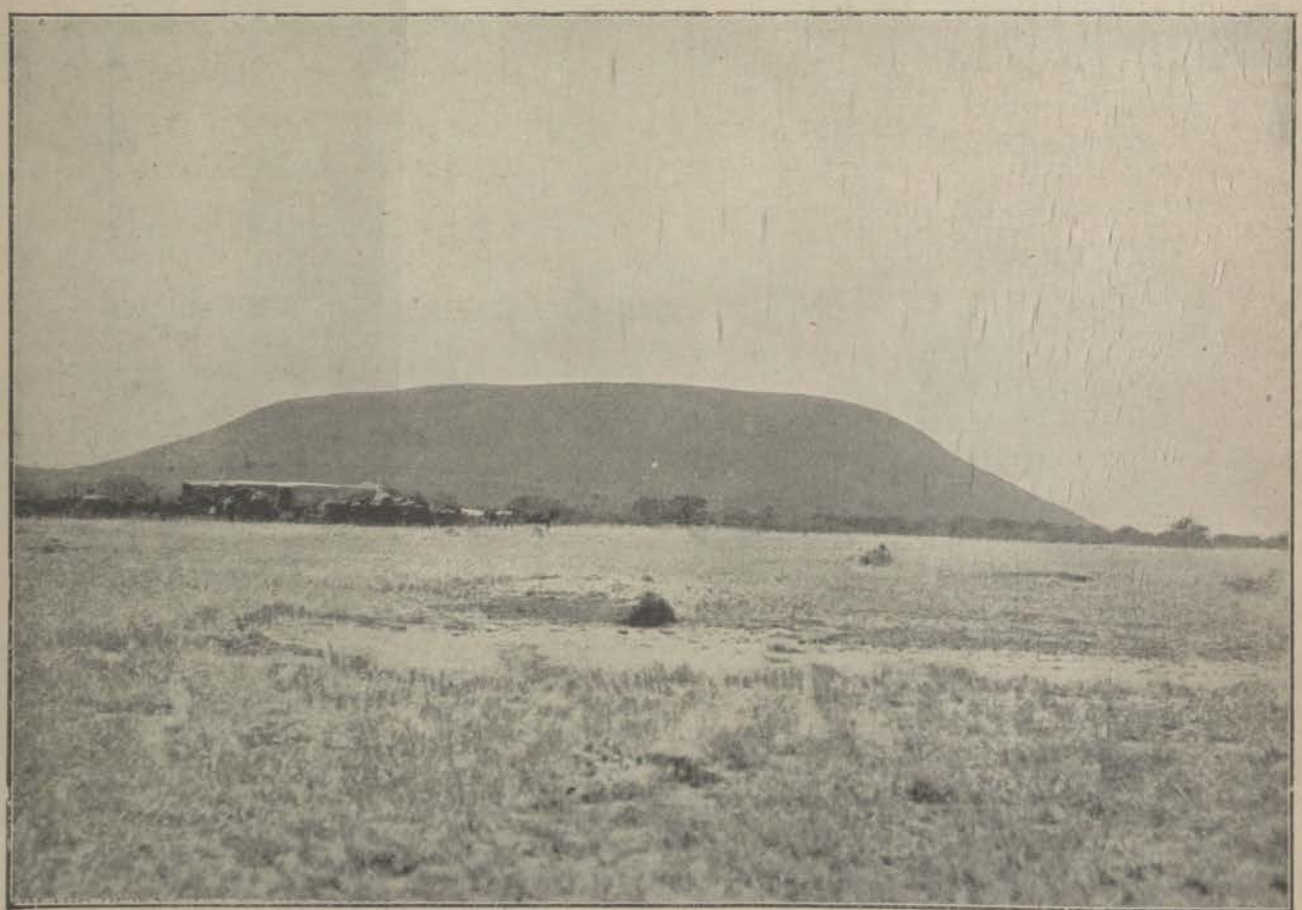
A considerable force of Boers was seen on the west of the town, apparently moving on Colenso. Determined to harass the enemy as long as it was possible, Sir George White sent out Brocklehurst with both the Hussar regiments, the 53rd Battery, two squadrons of Imperial

CAPTAIN ORR, OF THE IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE

Light Horse under Major Davis, and some mounted infantry. That able cavalry officer got in touch with the enemy beyond Bester's Spruit near the Dewdrop road. The guns came into action against the head of a large column marching southward, and silenced a field gun which attempted to reply. Thereupon the Boers took ground along three strongly-marked hills north and south of the road overlooking the artillery range, while our cavalry dismounted and lined the opposing ridges east of Bester's Spruit. Then began one of those widely-extended and lengthy actions which were a characteristic of the war. The enemy bringing artillery to bear on Brocklehurst's left flank from

THE TOWN OF LADYSMITH

the hills two or three miles to the south, reinforcements were sent for. Two more field batteries, the 5th Dragoon Guards, and three squadrons of Volunteer Cavalry arrived; the fire from the south was silenced and the kopjes to the west attacked with some success, though a squadron of Imperial Light Horse, penetrating too far along the Dewdrop road in the hope of securing a laager, rode into a *cul-de-sac*, and was forced



UMBULWANA HILL

to seek cover. They were extricated, however, by Major Gore with a squadron of the Dragoons, and both parties galloped back in open order under a heavy shell fire.

As frequently happens on such occasions, the casualties were few, Captain Knapp being killed and about half a dozen men wounded. Lieutenant Pomeroy distinguished himself by picking up a dismounted trooper and bringing him out of range. At four o'clock in the afternoon

THE BOERS SINGING PSALMS IN THEIR CAMP ON THE LADYSMITH HILLS

the Boers had been driven from their original position. No decisive success had been gained, for Brocklehurst made no further attempt to capture the laager which was near Dewdrop, and the force returned to camp closely shelled as it crossed the Klip bridge, by the guns on the Bulwana Hills. It was said that an artillery officer, introduced as an ambulance driver, had marked down the range.

If the aim of the operation had been to prevent the enemy from attacking Colenso, it was useless, for, as we have seen, that important point was abandoned in the evening of Thursday. But its moral effect, bearing witness as it did to the undiminished energy of the garrison, was considerable. The accounts of Boer losses and of annihilating cavalry charges brought in by Kaffirs, exaggerated though they were, go to prove that the enemy were seriously disconcerted by Brocklehurst's attack and suffered more heavily than the nature of the fight rendered probable.

After the night of November 3rd the investment of Ladysmith was accepted by both sides as an accomplished fact. The noose was to be drawn yet tighter, but it was already formed. We now take leave of the brave garrison and its high-souled commander, nor shall we return to them until we re-enter the town with the relieving army, and can read in its shattered houses and the emaciated faces of its garrison the gloomy but glorious record of what has passed in the interval.

The gloom of adversity was settling darkly on Natal. There was much anxiety as to the fate of the beleaguered town, much disappointment at the inability of the British forces to keep the field, in spite of the heroic efforts they had made. The eyes of all turned with impatient eagerness to Cape Colony and to the strong and silent soldier whose name brought with it memories of high daring, patient endurance, and unswerving coolness. With implicit confidence in Sir Redvers Buller the Empire awaited the commencement of the second act of the war.

A GROUP OF BOERS

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

CHAPTER IX

THE ARMY CORPS—BULLER'S CHANGE OF PLAN

THE ARMY CORPS—ORIGIN AND MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORPS SYSTEM—COMPOSITION AND NUMBERS OF BULLER'S FORCE—THE RESERVISTS—ENTHUSIASM IN ENGLAND—THE TRANSPORTS—BULLER'S ARRIVAL AT THE CAPE—SITUATION IN CAPE COLONY—ADVANTAGES OF OPERATIONS IN THE FREE STATE AS COMPARED WITH NATAL—EFFECTS OF EVENTS IN NATAL—POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES OF A CAMPAIGN IN NATAL—BULLER'S TEMPORISING POLICY—DIVISION OF HIS FORCES—WAS BULLER RIGHT IN MAKING HIS MAIN ATTACK IN NATAL?—COULD HE HAVE DESERTED THAT COLONY?—WOULD THE ADVANTAGES GAINED HAVE JUSTIFIED THIS STEP?—BULLER'S REASONS FOR CHOOSING NATAL—HOW FAR INFLUENCED BY THE CONDITION OF LADYSMITH—THE BAR TO DECISIVE SUCCESS WAS WANT OF MEN—THE BOERS RETAIN THE INITIATIVE

THE troops with whose assistance General Buller was expected to carry out his task began to leave England a week after his own departure. It will be well briefly to summarise the main features of their organisation, both as being interesting in itself and as furnishing a measure of the changes which the alteration of the plan of campaign involved.

Speaking generally army organisation aims at two things, firstly, the proper composition of the force, secondly, an adequate distribution of command. In other words, every body of troops must be suited to the special work it has to undertake, and consequently formed of a suitable proportion of the three arms, infantry, cavalry, and guns. Next, in order that it may be manageable, the labours of command must be so divided that the general can transmit his orders without having to waste his time in the supervision of endless details. Hence it is that armies are separated into larger and smaller groups of units, each having its own leader, who receives his orders from the commander of his group. The size of these groups depends upon the size of the army. In the case of Germany, for instance, where enormous masses

Photograph by] [*Knight, Aldershot*

GENERAL RT. HON. SIR REDVERS HENRY BULLER, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.M.G., K.C.B.

of men are brought into the field, the whole is divided into four or five armies, to the leaders of which the Commander-in-chief imparts his general object, and each of whom has to play his special part in its attainment. These army leaders give their orders to the corps-commanders, these to the divisional generals, these to the brigadiers, and so on down to the smallest units, batteries, squadrons, companies, and, if need be, to the individual private. It has been found by experience that one general cannot advantageously dictate orders for more than a certain number of the army units. A passage from Von Schellendorf's "Duties of the General Staff" will illustrate the difficulty. He says, "Experience teaches us . . . that the main difficulty in regulating the daily movements of armies does not arise so much from having to regulate the movements of the troops themselves, but from the difficulties connected with what is classed under the heading of supply columns, trains, baggage, &c. If the staff of the general commanding an army had, besides regulating the daily march of some eight infantry and two cavalry divisions, to issue instructions as to the position which the ammunition trains and supply columns were to take in the order of march, it would simply be attempting the impossible. The principle of the division of labour must in fact be applied."

The result is that the huge hosts of modern times are divided into a few large masses called Corps. This system was invented by Napoleon, who first employed armies on a scale approaching those of the present day. Requiring a speedy execution of his vast designs he concentrated two or three infantry divisions under the command of a marshal, usually sending general orders which he left him to carry out in detail. Since also large armies covered a great extent of country and consequently a single corps might find itself engaged at a distance from help, each was provided with sufficient cavalry and guns to make it independent. The size of these bodies of troops varied considerably, but in the best days of the Empire they averaged from 20,000 to 30,000 and the army corps of the present day do not in point of numbers greatly differ from them. The cavalry which remained over after the corps had been provided for were formed into divisions of four or six regiments, and used as occasion required. The main

THE ARMY CORPS: THE NEW HOWITZER BATTERY AT DRILL

difference between the organisation of Napoleon and that of modern Germany lies in the fact that the old tactics allowed of large special reserves of all arms, whereas nowadays what used to be called the Reserve Artillery is distributed amongst the corps, and picked bodies of infantry, such as the famous Imperial Guard, have disappeared altogether, each corps now furnishing its own reserves according to the circumstances of the moment.

Such are the main characteristics of the corps system, which was designed simply to make great armies manageable and their larger units independent. It was adopted in England when the three-corps programme for Home Defence was drawn up. If this country were ever invaded such an arrangement might be useful; but as applied to the force sent out to South Africa the name of Army Corps soon lost all its modern meaning, *i.e.*, that of the sub-division of an army, and both Sir Redvers Buller and Lord Roberts, who commanded forces equal or superior in size to the so-called corps, worked on the old divisional system which obtained in Spain under Wellington. In fact, the small size of the British armies rendered the corps system unnecessary and purely nominal. Even the corps artillery, which is the great binding link between the infantry divisions of the Continent, was, owing to various circumstances, never exactly completed according to the *Ordre de Bataille*, Lord Roberts wisely giving all the Horse Artillery to his cavalry commander, and supplementing such field batteries as were not attached to the infantry with powerful naval guns of large calibre. In one sense perhaps the idea of the army corps had an unfortunate influence on the composition of the force, for the proportions of the different arms were decided by a European standard, whereas the fact that we were fighting an army of mounted infantry demanded a larger number of horsemen. This deficiency was scarcely supplied by the South African mounted volunteers and the excellent contingents sent by our colonies.

The composition of Sir Redvers Buller's force was approximately as follows:—

A Cavalry Division consisting of two brigades of three regiments. Each regiment had with it a machine-gun, and each brigade was

THE ARMY CORPS: ARTILLERY EMBARKING AT SOUTHAMPTON

accompanied by four companies of Mounted Infantry, each company by a machine-gun. The division had two batteries of Horse Artillery and a field troop of Engineers. Its fighting strength was 2,400 sabres, 1,000 rifles of the Mounted Infantry, and 150 of the Engineers, with twelve horsed-guns and fourteen machine-guns. Including the staffs, artillerymen, non-combatants, and train it numbered 5,600 men, together with 5,000 horses and 2,300 mules. So heavily weighted is the most mobile force that can be placed in the field.

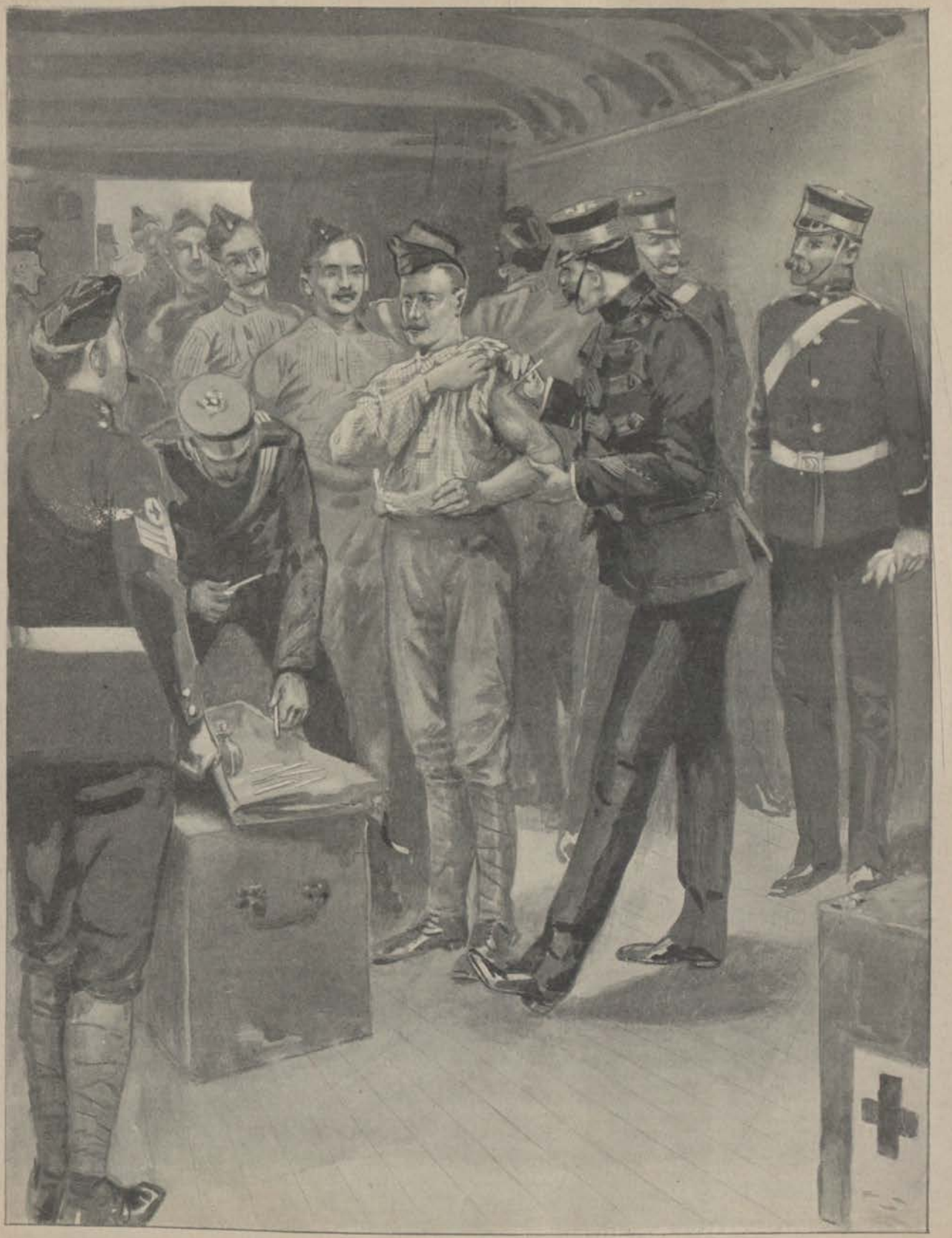
Three Infantry Divisions, each consisting of two brigades of four battalions. Each battalion had a machine-gun. Each division had allotted to it three batteries of field artillery, one squadron of cavalry, and one company of engineers. It had a fighting strength of 7,040 rifles of the infantry, and 150 of the engineers, with 134 sabres, eighteen field guns and eight machine-guns. With staffs, &c., the division amounted to 10,000 men, with 900 horses and 2,100 mules.

The Corps Troops comprised the corps artillery, two horsed, three field, and three howitzer batteries, and other less conspicuous but no less important items such as the corps engineers, including the balloon, telegraph, and railway companies, a battalion of infantry, a regiment of cavalry, a field bakery, and hospital, and the supply and ammunition parks, those last ponderous links of the chain which is bound to the foot of a marching host.

Including the Headquarters Staff, which alone numbered thirty-four officers and 137 men, the Corps Troops numbered over 5,000, with 2,500 horses and nearly 2,000 mules.

The Troops on the Line of Communications consisted of seven infantry battalions.

The scale of the medical preparations is shown by the following facts. Besides the bearer companies and field hospitals attached to each brigade there were to be divisional and corps hospitals, four station hospitals on the line of communication, four general hospitals at the base each furnishing 520 beds, two advanced depôts of medical stores, two at the base, two hospital trains, two Government hospital ships, and two others fitted out by the generosity of the Princess of Wales and the American ladies.



INOCULATING TROOPS FOR TYPHOID FEVER ON BOARD THE *ROSLIN CASTLE*

After the whole of the troops had left the base a reserve depôt of 4,000 men was to be formed there to replace casualties. According to rule, depôts furnishing 350 saddle and 650 baggage horses were also to be established, and for this purpose a farm was procured at Stellenbosch, thirty miles east of Cape Town.

Great efforts were made to supply the force with sufficient food. The aim of these was that there should always be full four months' provisions at the seat of war. At the beginning of the campaign this was not possible, but later on the four months' limit was realised, and maintained. A few items of the amount of food necessary for 116,000 men and 51,000 horses and mules for that period were contained in a *Times* article which appeared on November 30th, and may be of some interest here. Preserved meat, 12,000,000 lb.; biscuit, ditto; coffee, 400,000 lb.; tea, 200,000 lb.; sugar, 2,200,000 lb.; compressed vegetables, 800,000 lb.; salt, 400,000 lb.; condensed milk, 360,000 tins; jam, the value of which was discovered during the Sudan expedition of 1884–5, was supplied at the rate of 1,450,000 lb. for four months. As regards liquids there were on the list 80,000 gallons of rum, 12,000 bottles of whiskey, 32,000 bottles of port wine, 400,000 lb. of lime juice, and 80 tons of alum for purifying water. Other items were 40,000 lb. of tobacco supplied by the War Office at 1s. per pound. The hospital stores were based on the supposition that 10 per cent. of the troops would always be sick and wounded. Many tons of disinfectants, and 80,000 lb. of candles were also provided, and 25,000 tons of hay, 31,000 tons of oats, and 3,000 tons of bran were needed for the animals. The mules were procured at the outbreak of war in America, Spain, and Italy by special parties of officers and veterinary surgeons, sent out some months beforehand to make inquiries. The greatest difficulty was the waggon supply. The special kind required, long, low, and hard to upset, was only obtainable in South Africa and America, but unfortunately the civil authorities decided that none should be brought from America and the deficiency seriously handicapped the transport. At the end of November great difficulties were still experienced in this respect. Later on traction engines were successfully employed.

Photograph by] [*Cribb, Southsea*

THE 2ND QUEEN'S ROYAL WEST SURREY REGIMENT LEAVING PORTSDOWN

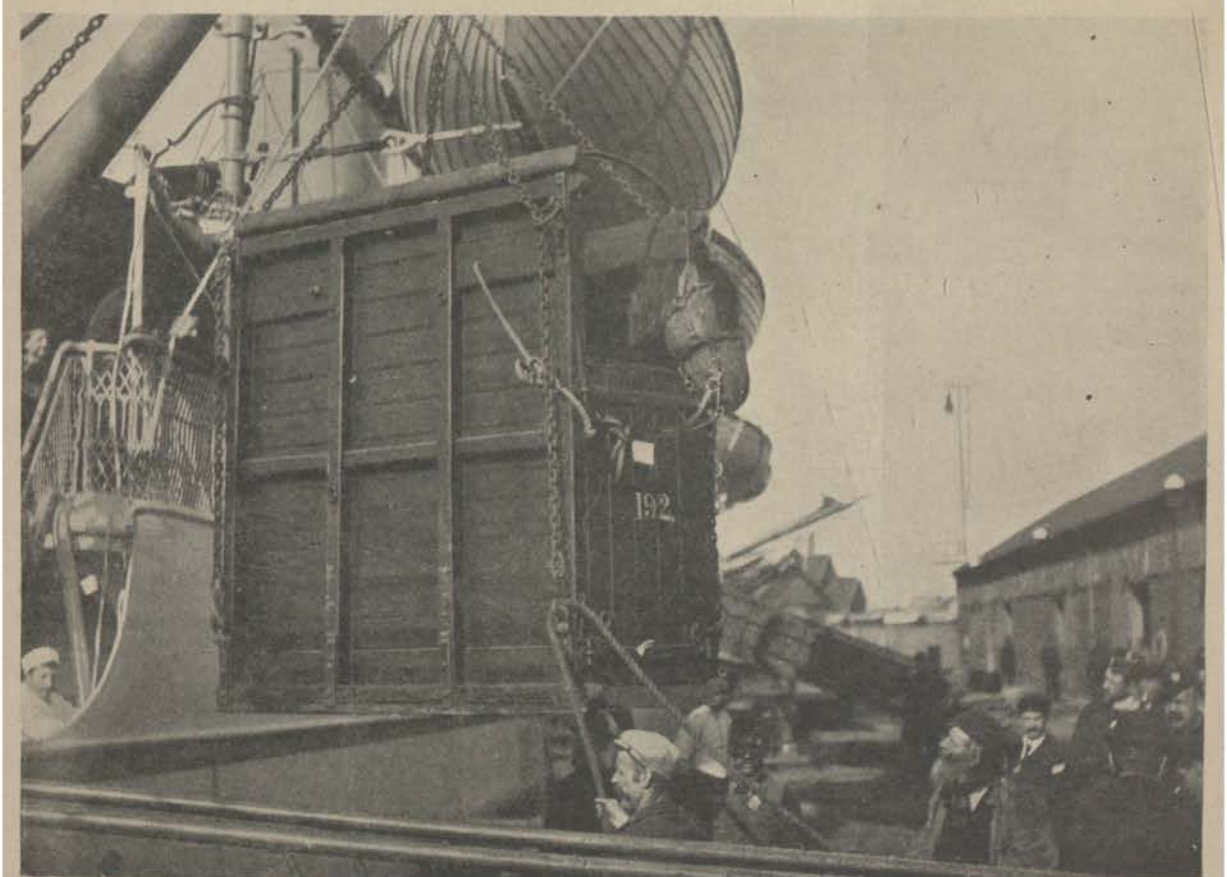
The West Surrey Regiment served as Marines in Lord Howe's fleet in 1794, and a large draft fought in the *Queen Charlotte*. That vessel eventually became the *Excellent* Gunnery School, and to keep up old associations it was decided that as the first half-battalion would leave the forts on Portsdown Hill accompanied by the regimental band, the second half-battalion should have an escort that should make amends for any deficiency in this respect. The first half-battalion left at nine o'clock, and an hour later a battalion of 600 Bluejackets, with band, arrived at Cosham from Whale Island. The sailors lined the village street, while the band went on to meet the troops, and played them to the station.

Exclusive of troops already in South Africa, Sir Redvers Buller was to have at his command 47,763 men of which the fighting strength, exclusive of officers, numbered about 28,600 bayonets, 4,200 horsemen, 114 horse and field guns, with 3,500 artillerymen, and 47 machine-guns. In order to live and fight this force required some 2,650 vehicles, over 11,000 horses, and 14,000 mules.[1]

Everything was done to give consistency and strength to the mass. The brigading of battalions according to their nationality or their special nature was a wise arrangement which had never before been carried out so completely. The regret which the abolition of the old and famous regimental numbers had excited vanished before the new interest created by the territorial titles and the eagerness with which the deeds of the county corps were followed. So compact a force had never left England before, nor one animated with a higher spirit. The war was a thoroughly popular one, and the service itself was viewed with very different feelings to those which prevailed when Moore trained the Light Division at Shorncliffe, or when the ill-organised, ill-equipped though heroic army of Lord Raglan sailed for Varna. The incoming of the Reservists sufficiently indicated the feeling of the soldier. Of 25,000 men called up nearly all had put in an appearance by the night of October 17th, and of these 21,067 were pronounced capable of active service. The British soldier had no longer to fight and conquer "under the cold shade of the aristocracy." Manufacturers supported and facilitated the withdrawal of their workmen by an assurance that they would not be forgotten on their return. Everywhere the men were enthusiastically received, huge crowds watching the departure of the transports, as day after day, beginning from October 20th, they ploughed seaward with their proud and confident freights. The heaving masses who watched from the shore at Southampton, at Portsmouth, and at Tilbury were animated with the same spirit as those that had seen Nelson go aboard the *Victory*, but in that instance one man embodied all they felt of patriotism, while in the present case every private went forth as a representative of the Mother Country and the

[1] For further details see Chart and Colonel Brunker's "Boer War"; also "The British Army," and the *Militär Wochenblatt*, October 28, November 4 and 8, 1899.

Empire. For besides the sense of pride in their soldiers, men felt an added enthusiasm in the thought that the wrongs of twenty humiliating years were to be righted, that the South African question was once for all to be settled, that a great load of doubt and dread was to be lifted from the shoulders of loyal and steadfast colonies, and that a heavy reproach was to be taken away from the English name.



Photograph by] [*Cribb, Southsea*

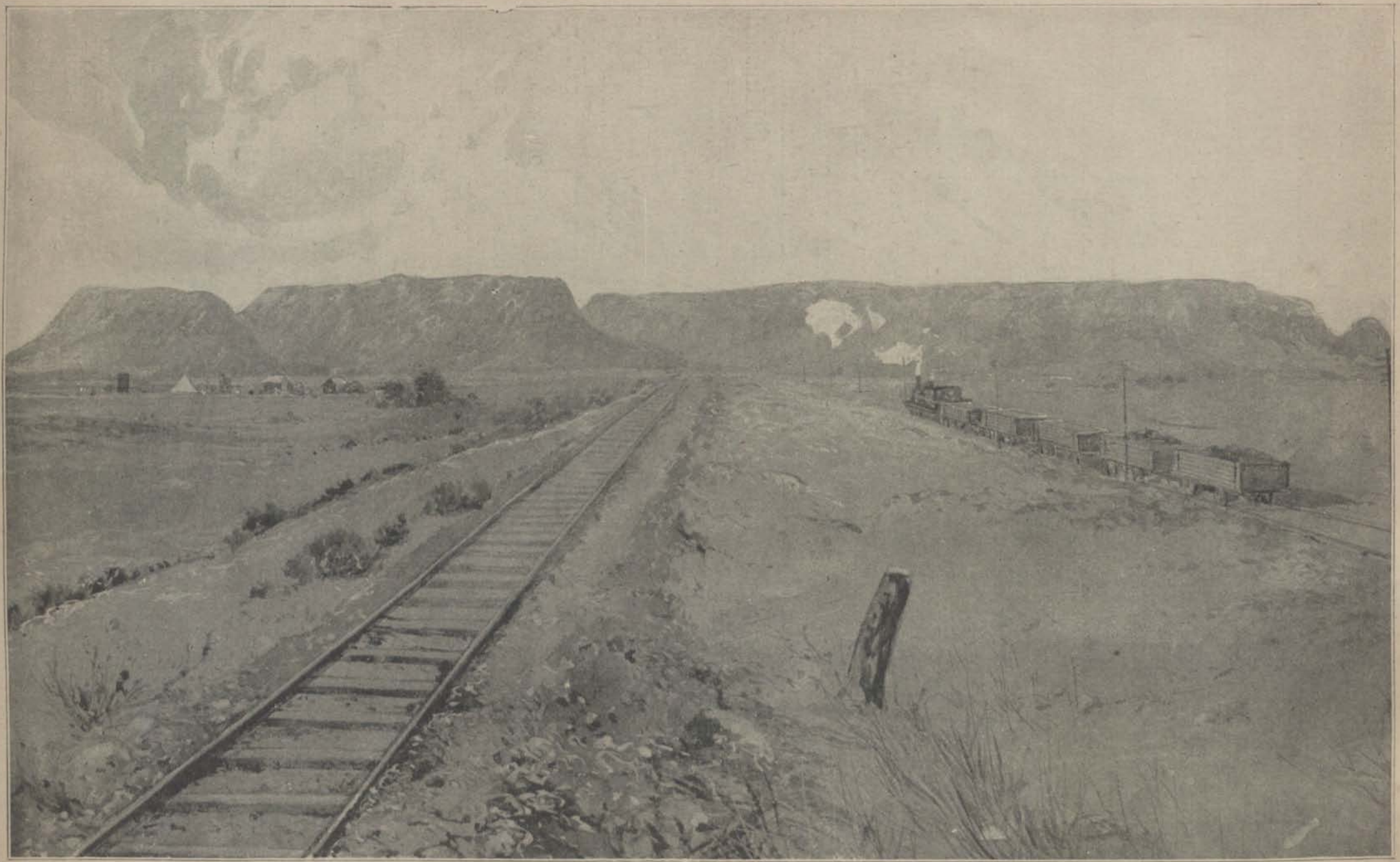
THE ARMY CORPS: SHIPPING HORSES

With some exceptions, notably the wrecking of the *Ismore*, which occasioned heavy loss in horses to the 10th Hussars and to the artillery which accompanied them, the transports did their work well enough. Complaints were raised that the War Office should have chartered faster and roomier ships. Hardly any were, in the modern sense of the word, fast, but most proved themselves good ocean-boats, and as to accommodation, complaints were few. On one laden with horses the scenes

during a heavy storm were frightful, some of the stalls breaking loose and the unfortunate animals being cruelly maimed. But generally speaking the transports were reliable, and such defects as existed at first were eliminated by constant practice. Never in modern times was the shipment of an army conducted with such ease, speed, and regularity.

SIR REDVERS BULLER'S ARRIVAL AT CAPE TOWN: THE DRIVE TO GOVERNMENT HOUSE

Leaving the preliminary questions of organisation and transports, we return to Sir Redvers Buller at Cape Town. He arrived on the day of Nicholson's Nek to find himself face to face with a crisis which demanded all his judgment and vigour. The sieges of Mafeking and Kimberley had begun, and the line of the southern frontier of the Free State was dotted with Boers. Though none of the latter



DE AAR, SHOWING THE RAILWAY TO KIMBERLEY

had as yet crossed the Orange River, the whole population to the south was in a ferment, the loyalists nervous and the rebel Dutch eagerly expectant. The British posts were altogether too weak to meet an attack, and the only Regulars disposable were the 6,000 men which had formed or had been dispatched to augment the usual garrison at the Cape.

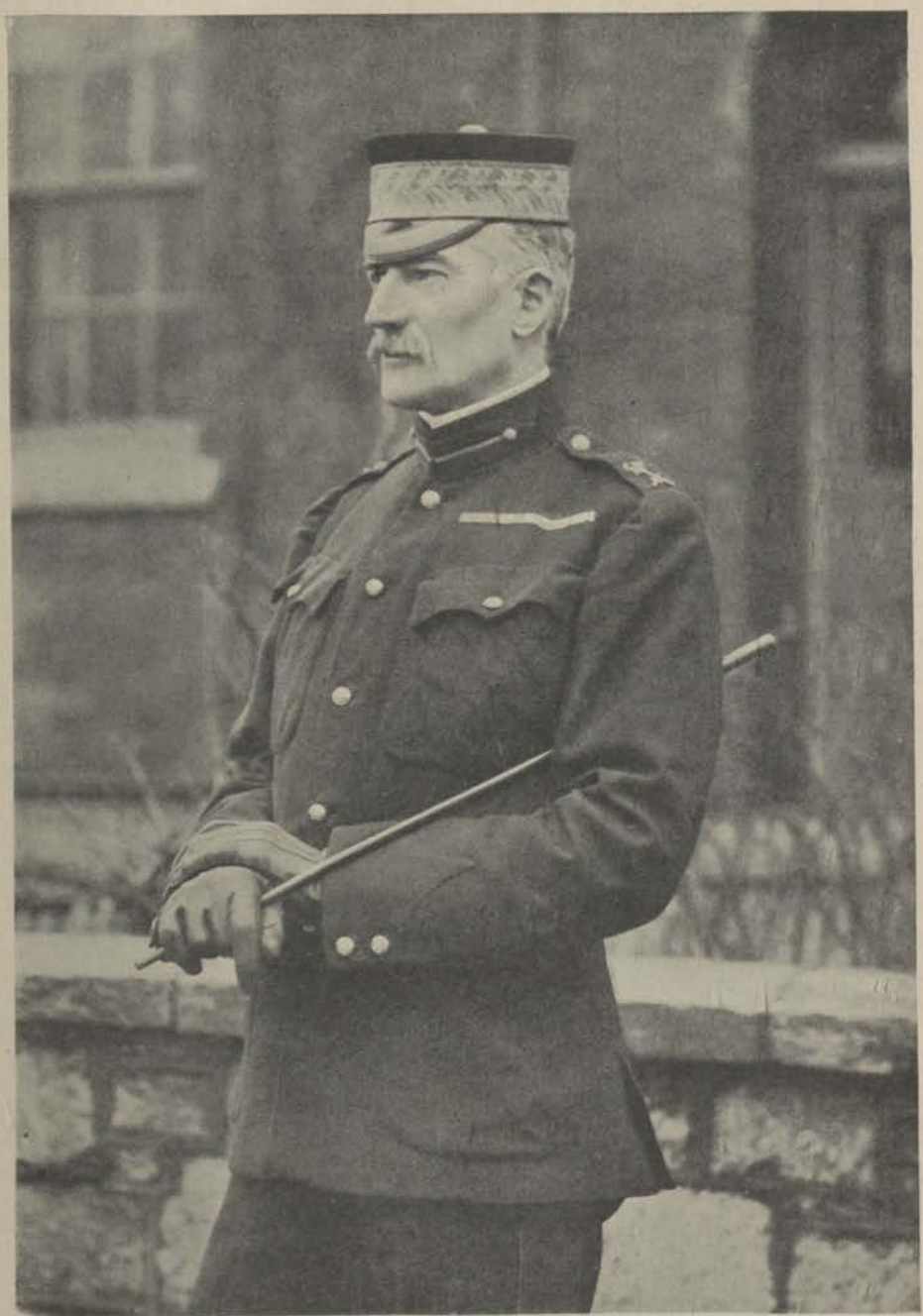
The various volunteer corps in the Colony, of which we shall have occasion to speak further on, were partly employed as police, partly as scouts. They had been called out on October 16th, *i.e.*, five days after the declaration of war, but were not placed under Buller's command until November 7th. At the moment of his arrival small detachments of mounted men were observing the various bridges over the Orange River, such as those at Bethulie, Aliwal North, Norval's Pont, and the old Colesberg waggon bridge. The most important preparatory step on our side had been the formation of a fortified camp at the railway-bridge near Hopetown, where a mixed force under Colonel Kincaird had made ample provision for the defence of the passage, and was busily employed in the collection of stores. Another link on the Cape Town-Kimberley line was De Aar Junction, where lay a second encampment, and at Wynberg a hospital had been established. Of the regular infantry four companies of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment were in Kimberley; the other wing of the battalion was with the Royal Munsters, the Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 9th Lancers at the Orange River bridge. The Yorkshire Light Infantry were entrusted with the protection of De Aar. Half the 2nd Berkshires were on the same line; the rest were in the neighbourhood of Stormberg.

Up to the end of October, apart from the sieges, there had been no fighting except a small armoured train skirmish beyond the Modder River at Spytfontein. The enemy seemed in no hurry to move to the southward. The magazines at De Aar and on the Orange River were steadily increased, though an irruption across the frontier, distant from the last-named place only a few miles, was constantly expected. No doubt the Boers missed a great chance in not making a bold dash about this time. A strong, concentrated effort against our establishments on the Cape Town railroad might have seriously

endangered the troops and stores, and provided a most favourable opportunity for raising rebellion throughout the northern part of the Colony. That something of the kind was not attempted must be attributed either to supineness or want of preparation on the part of the Free Staters. Had they followed the example of the Transvaalers, and crossed the frontier within a few days of the declaration of war, General Buller would have found a problem even harder than that which actually awaited him.

As he had left England about a week before the earliest shipload started, he could not hope to receive reinforcements for at least that space of time after his arrival. In the meantime he had to decide the most difficult and momentous question which awaits a General—the choice of his line of operations. Before the bad news came from Natal, the English General had intended to advance into the Free State, crush the enemy's forces there, and move direct upon Pretoria. Hence the preparations in which that indefatigable body, the Army Service Corps, had been engaged some months before the war broke out. An advance from this direction had several advantages. In the first place, it would dissipate all danger to the Colony, whether from the enemy themselves or from rebels; in the second place, an invasion of the Free State gave better hopes of breaking up the hostile alliance than an advance in Natal. It was known that the southern Boers were better inclined towards England, more peaceable, and more unwilling to risk the loss of their private property than the Transvaalers. They were fighting moreover in a quarrel which was not their own, and one heavy defeat might detach them from their rough and exacting allies. In the third place, their country, though it is not the smooth unbroken plain it was sometimes represented as being, gave far more scope to the movements and tactics of a regular army than did the lofty and precipitous hills, deep dongas, and endless kopjes of Northern Natal. In point of distance, Cape Town is just twice as far as Durban from Pretoria, *i.e.*, 1,040 as against 511 miles by rail. Of the first number, however, 600 miles, on the latter 170, might in a sense be discounted as being covered by railways under British control. Supposing—and at the beginning of the war it appeared a moderate supposition enough—

that the passages of the Tugela and the Orange River were in our hands, the British forces in Cape Colony and Natal would be respectively

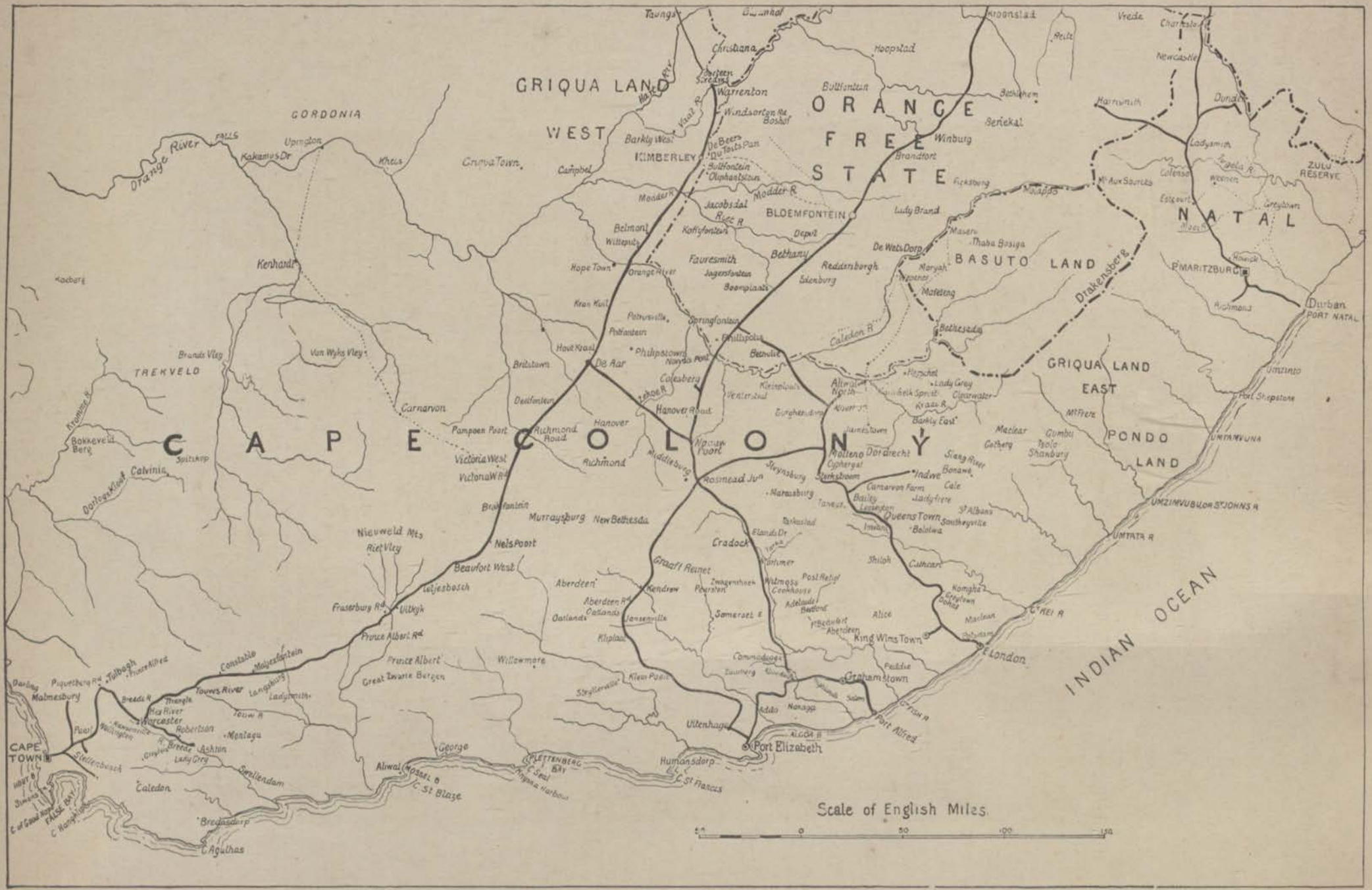


Photograph by] [*Russell & Sons*

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR F. W. E. FORESTIER-WALKER, K.C.B.

Commanding the Lines of Communication in South Africa

within 412 and 330 miles of the Dutch capital, the presumable objective of the whole campaign. The rather longer march by Bloemfontein was



MAP OF THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

more than balanced by the extremely difficult country north of the Tugela. Thus in every meaning of the word strategical—a term that embraces every consideration that must occupy the attention of a General in the choice of a field of operations—a movement with the main body through the Free State was obviously the best. This would undoubtedly have been the course taken had the British held the initiative.

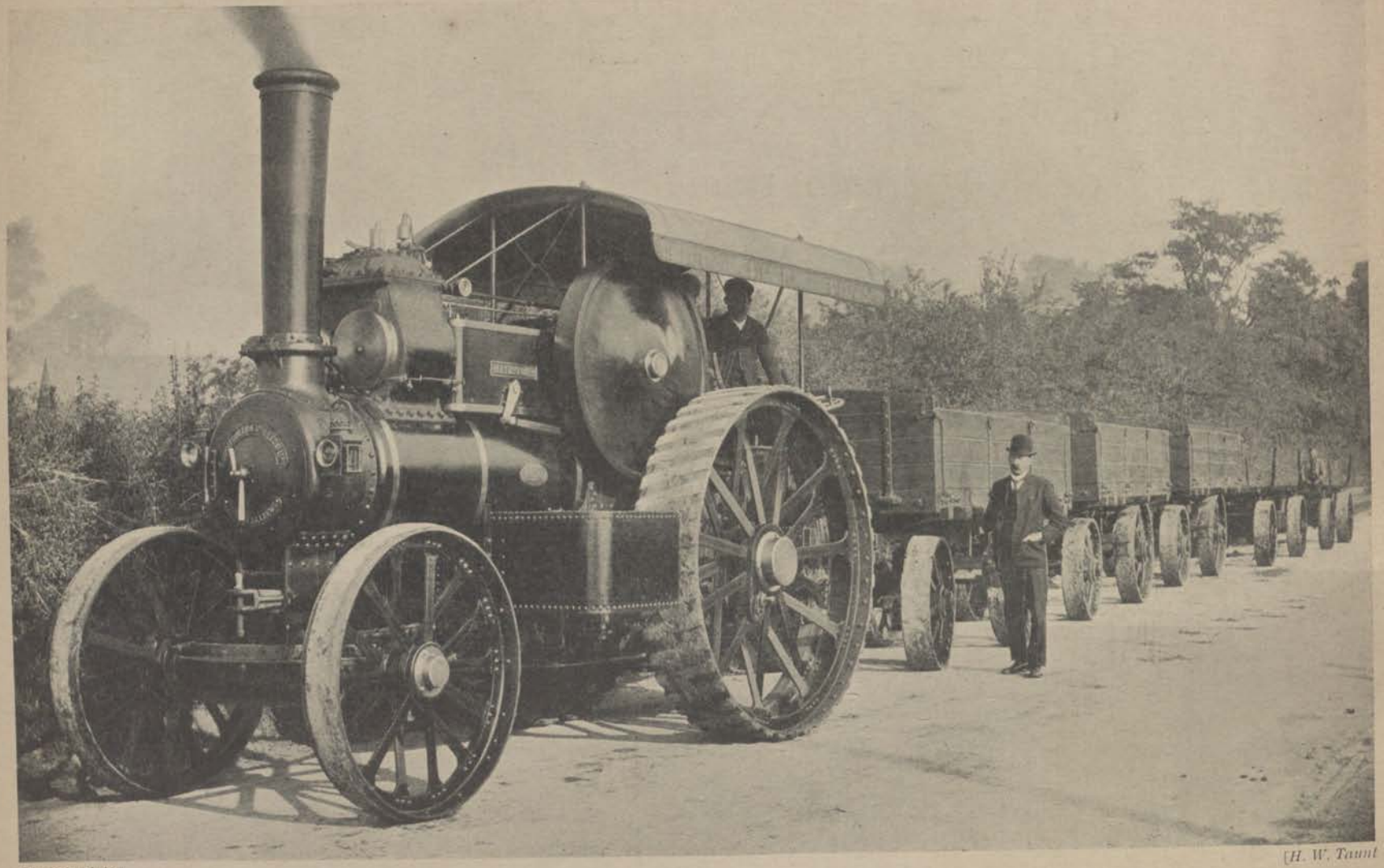
Unfortunately for Sir Redvers their successes in Natal had placed that immense advantage in the hands of the enemy. Even in Cape Colony the situation was becoming more critical. On November 1st Norval's Pont was crossed by the Boers; five commandos, numbering 3,000 in all, and armed with guns, mustered at Bethulie, and everything pointed to a strong and immediate attack upon the Colony at its weakest point. The enemy round Kimberley, too, was increasing, and the troops at Hopetown and De Aar could ill be spared. The only other regulars were the four companies of the Berkshires and a Naval Brigade of about 200 men from H.M.S. *Doris* at Stormberg. The English General shrunk from leaving the Colony thus exposed. He was in a most trying position, for he could not hope to collect enough troops for offensive operations for at least another month. In the meantime, unless a force was sent to defend it, a large part of Cape Colony would be overrun. If, on the other hand, he threw his whole weight upon the Orange River, Southern Natal would be devastated to the sea.

Had the whole of the Army Corps been available at Cape Town or Durban when Sir Redvers arrived, he might have been able by quick and vigorous action to strike so heavy a blow in one of the two theatres of war as to take the pressure off the other. But as this was not the case, he necessarily decided upon a temporising policy. He resolved to break up the original organisation of the corps, diverting about a third of his troops under Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley, a mixed force, consisting of part of the Cavalry Division and Colonial troops under General French towards Colesberg, and another and weaker force under the intended commander of the 3rd Division, General Gatacre, to oppose the invaders on the line Queenstown-Sterkstroom. The rest he determined to send to Natal. The detailed composition of these forces we shall refer to later. For our present purpose it is

sufficient to notice that out of the thirty-seven battalions which constituted the infantry of the Corps, the Lines of Communication, and the Garrison, seventeen were in Cape Colony on the day of Magersfontein, after which the first part of the offensive operations there came to an end. The whole of the Cavalry Division, with the exception of one regiment, was also directed thither, and the artillery was divided, the horse batteries going to French and Methuen. Hence, when we remember that Sir Redvers could only bring sixteen infantry battalions into line at Colenso, four days after the repulse at Magersfontein, we see that the Commander-in-chief practically split up his forces into two fairly equal divisions. This was due partly to the greater length of frontier that the British forces on the Orange River were required to cover, partly to the fact that offensive operations were attempted there as well as in Natal. The stream of invasion was split into several channels with the result that none of the different forces proved powerful enough for their tasks.

It is easy to criticise the decision of General Buller. It is more difficult to agree with those who favoured the disembarkation of the whole Army Corps in Natal. We hold that General Buller was right in defending the Orange River frontier, seeing that he was unable at the moment to operate decisively there or elsewhere. You may disregard the flood of rebellion so long as you can reach the fountain-head. But if that is impossible, you must check the inundation by temporary measures. The force detached to hold the northern part of Cape Colony was sufficient to dam the tide, not to drive it back. To take the offensive in widely separated columns along a front of hundreds of miles was a grave error, on which the history of the operations themselves is the best comment.

But the defence of the Orange Free State being provided for, what was to be done with the rest of the Corps, some two divisions of infantry and a powerful force of artillery? There were three courses open. Either all these troops could be despatched to Natal, or united for a grand offensive in Cape Colony, or part might be sent to Durban to defend the country south of the Tugela, and the remainder concentrated at the Cape. The choice of this last alternative would



Photograph by] [*H. W. Taunt*

THE ARMY CORPS; STEAM TRANSPORT

certainly help to complete the task which Sir George White, in drawing upon himself the Boer army at Ladysmith, had undertaken, namely, it would prevent the enemy from advancing southwards. But it would be too weak to materially aid the garrison or seriously impede the action of the besiegers north of the river. It would furthermore weaken the army on the Orange River without affecting anything decisive in Natal, and, should Ladysmith fall, be attacked by the whole force of Joubert and driven back upon Durban. On the other hand, to desert Natal altogether, defending only the seaports, would be a policy only justified by swift and decisive success elsewhere. But with the entire army corps on the high seas this was impossible. Nor did it necessarily follow that the advance of 35,000 fighting men into the Free States would immediately take the pressure off Natal. Later events fully justified this remark. The advance of 50,000 men under Lord Roberts did not save Sir Redvers Buller from ten days of desperate fighting, nor, when the siege of Ladysmith was raised and Bloemfontein entered, did the enemy quit Natal. Are we then justified in supposing that the irruption of a much smaller body would have effected more, or that it would have proved strong enough to advance upon Pretoria and threaten the passes of the Drakensberg? And if a halt had become necessary what would have happened to Natal, and what of Buller's own position in a vast and hostile territory, where advance and retreat would have been equally dangerous?

In writing the above no attempt has been made to guess at General Buller's views at the moment of his arrival. In the following remarks we have endeavoured to trace his thoughts by observing his actions. Clearly it was the situation in Natal that drew him thither. Three objects were obtained by successful action there, though two of them were practically merged in the third, the primal necessity of a great victory. However heavy the odds against such a consummation the attempt was worth the risk. A decisive defeat of Joubert would break the offensive power of the enemy and seriously impair his chances of prolonging a defensive struggle. It is unnecessary to draw as sharp a distinction as some critics have done between the different reasons which caused General Buller to try his fortune on the Tugela. We

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FRANCIS CLERY, K.C.B.

need not believe that Sir George White's despatches exaggerated the peril of Ladysmith; on the contrary, we know that that gallant soldier afterwards assured Mr. Churchill that he had never pressed for immediate succour. But he held strong views as to the importance of the town in the eyes of the enemy, and doubtless unfolded them to his chief. Sir Redvers must also have felt the obligations of the Empire to Natal, and the supreme need of maintaining our prestige.

The sum of these considerations may well have caused him to go to the relief of White at once. As he was without the means of rapidly repairing the misfortunes of his lieutenant by an immediate and overwhelming advance upon Bloemfontein, he took the wisest course when he went direct to his aid. He soon became convinced that his forces were inadequate, for on November 11th the 5th Division was ordered to mobilise. It is an interesting question whether Sir Redvers ever contemplated an advance with his principal army by Laing's Nek. More probably he intended to restore the position in Natal, and then to send part of his army back to Cape Colony. This may have been the reason that he directed nearly all his cavalry to the Orange River, though horsemen afterwards proved of immense value to him despite the unfavourable nature of the Tugela country. Not until after Colenso were the full difficulties of his task made manifest, his whole force, plus the 5th Division, devoted to the relief of Ladysmith, the 6th and 7th Divisions mobilised and the new plan developed under the direction of Lord Roberts.

The true solution of the problem, which, together with skilful generalship, eventually proved successful, was the doubling of the forces sent to South Africa. The first army, some 70,000 fighting men, was unequal to its task, and that not simply numerically but because its main body arrived after the mischief had been done That it should arrive late was unavoidable if the Transvaal Government was equal to its self-imposed policy. The mistake lay in the fact that when it did appear on the scene it was too weak to recover the lost ground. This weakness was but another phase of the grand and fatal blunder of the whole war, the complete underestimation of the enemy's strength. Sir Redvers Buller found himself obliged either to abandon one of the Colonies entirely, or to divide his forces. He

determined upon the last alternative, and chose Natal as his first theatre of operations because the crisis there was most imminent.

Two grand deciding facts dominated the second phase of the campaign. The first was that the Boer strategy had so far succeeded that reconstruction of the English plan was inevitable. The army which was to have defended Natal was partially incapacitated, and if nothing immediate and decisive could be done elsewhere, temporary measures had to be resorted to. The second great fact was the weakness of the British forces. The numerous tasks imposed on Buller's army made it impossible for the General to act decisively in any direction. The blunders committed in the field emphasise rather than lessen the truth of this remark. Six gloomy weeks passed away before the error was fully realised.

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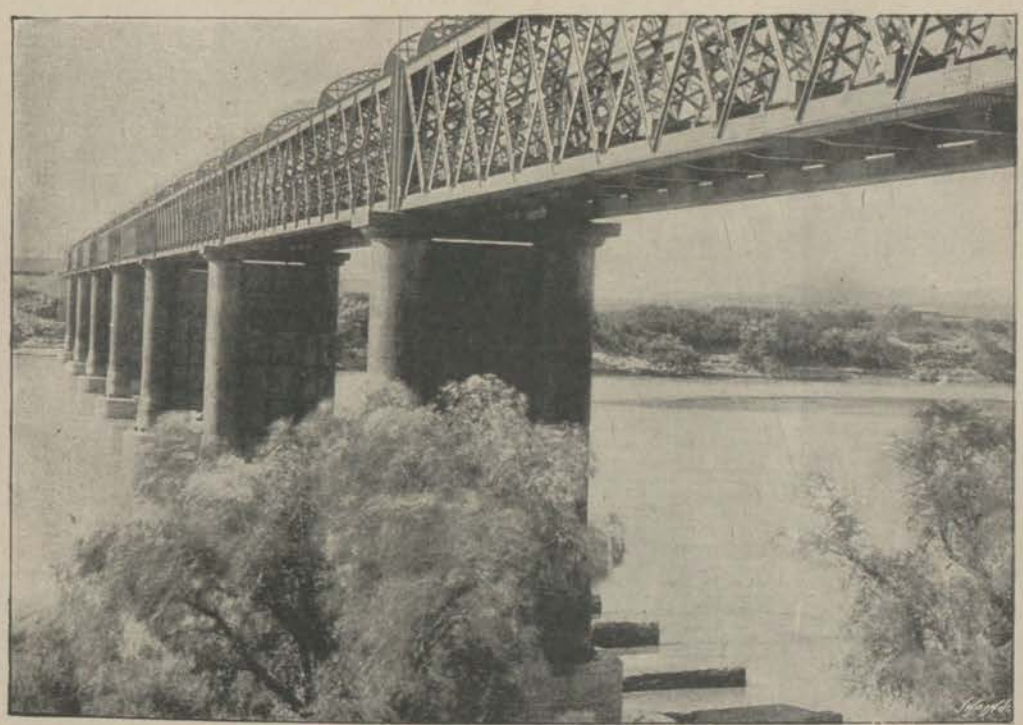
CHAPTER X

METHUEN'S ADVANCE—BELMONT

METHUEN'S MARCH TO THE RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY—REASONS WHY IT WAS UNDERTAKEN—COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE THREE POSSIBLE LINES OF ADVANCE THROUGH CAPE COLONY—POSITION OF AFFAIRS WHEN METHUEN LEFT THE ORANGE RIVER—COLONEL GOUGH'S SKIRMISH NEAR BELMONT ON NOVEMBER 10TH—ADVANCE OF METHUEN'S COLUMN ON BELMONT—ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MARCH—RECONNAISSANCE OF NOVEMBER 22ND—BATTLE OF BELMONT—BOER POSITIONS—METHUEN'S PLAN—ADVANCE OF RIGHT WING, CONSISTING OF GUARDS BRIGADE—LEFT WING—KOPJES STORMED—RETREAT OF THE ENEMY—WHY THE PURSUIT WAS ARRESTED—LOSSES, ETC.

THE length of the southern frontier of the Free State, from the Basuto Land border to Hopetown is, roughly speaking, 210 miles. Commencing from the point where the Orange River leaves Basuto Land we have the following passages:—Aliwal North, fifty miles S.W., Bethulie, fifty miles W.N.W. of Aliwal North, Norval's Pont, twenty-five W. of Bethulie, the Colesberg waggon bridge fifteen miles W.N.W. of Norval's Pont, and the bridge near Hopetown seventy miles N.W. of the Colesberg crossing. From Aliwal North to Hopetown the whole of this line was threatened, and by the middle of November the enemy had penetrated its centre at the Colesberg and Bethulie bridges, and at Aliwal North. Between Hopetown and Kimberley, they had contented themselves with breaking the Modder bridge and blowing up the culverts, for the siege of Kimberley detained a considerable part of their force, and the Orange River Camp was now strong enough to resist any ordinary attack. Despite the arrival of General Cronje with reinforcements the Boers were evidently unwilling to adopt offensive measures until they had reduced the town. Kimberley had thus far easily repulsed their attacks, so that in the western quarter there was no call for immediate British action, either to meet an advance

towards the Orange River or to relieve the garrison. It was rather to the east round Colesberg and Burghersdorp that strong and rapid operations were required. Here the Dutch population was in a ferment, and though no general rising had taken place the defeat of the enemy and the prompt dispersion of the rebels was becoming hourly more important. To onlookers therefore it seemed probable that the main strength of the defending force would be sent towards Colesberg and Bethulie, while a sufficient detachment observed the



BETHULIE BRIDGE

Boers south of Kimberley and protected the Cape Town railway to the Orange River.

Precisely the opposite plan was decided on. The main column was directed upon Kimberley, a small force was landed at East London, and a detachment under General French was sent from De Aar to Naauwpoort to check the advance of the enemy and the spread of the rebellion in the Colesberg region.

The alternative of a direct advance upon Bloemfontein from the central bridges, *i.e.*, those of Colesberg and Bethulie, suggests itself

to an ordinary observer as the most direct route to Bloemfontein, and as possessing an important advantage over the Kimberley line, namely, that whereas in the latter case the railway only runs as far as the starting point, in the former it leads straight

NORVAL'S PONT BRIDGE, NEAR COLESBERG

through the Free State capital to Pretoria, and so provides the best means of transport on the rear of an army. Moreover, an advance from Bethulie would speedily affect the army besieging Kimberley, and give a chance of intercepting it as it retired east or north-east. On the other hand, the country round Colesberg and the Stormberg range north of Sterkstroom were admirably suited to the Boer tactics, the

THE BRIDGE OVER THE ORANGE RIVER BELOW HOPETOWN (PARTIALLY DESTROYED BY THE BRITISH)

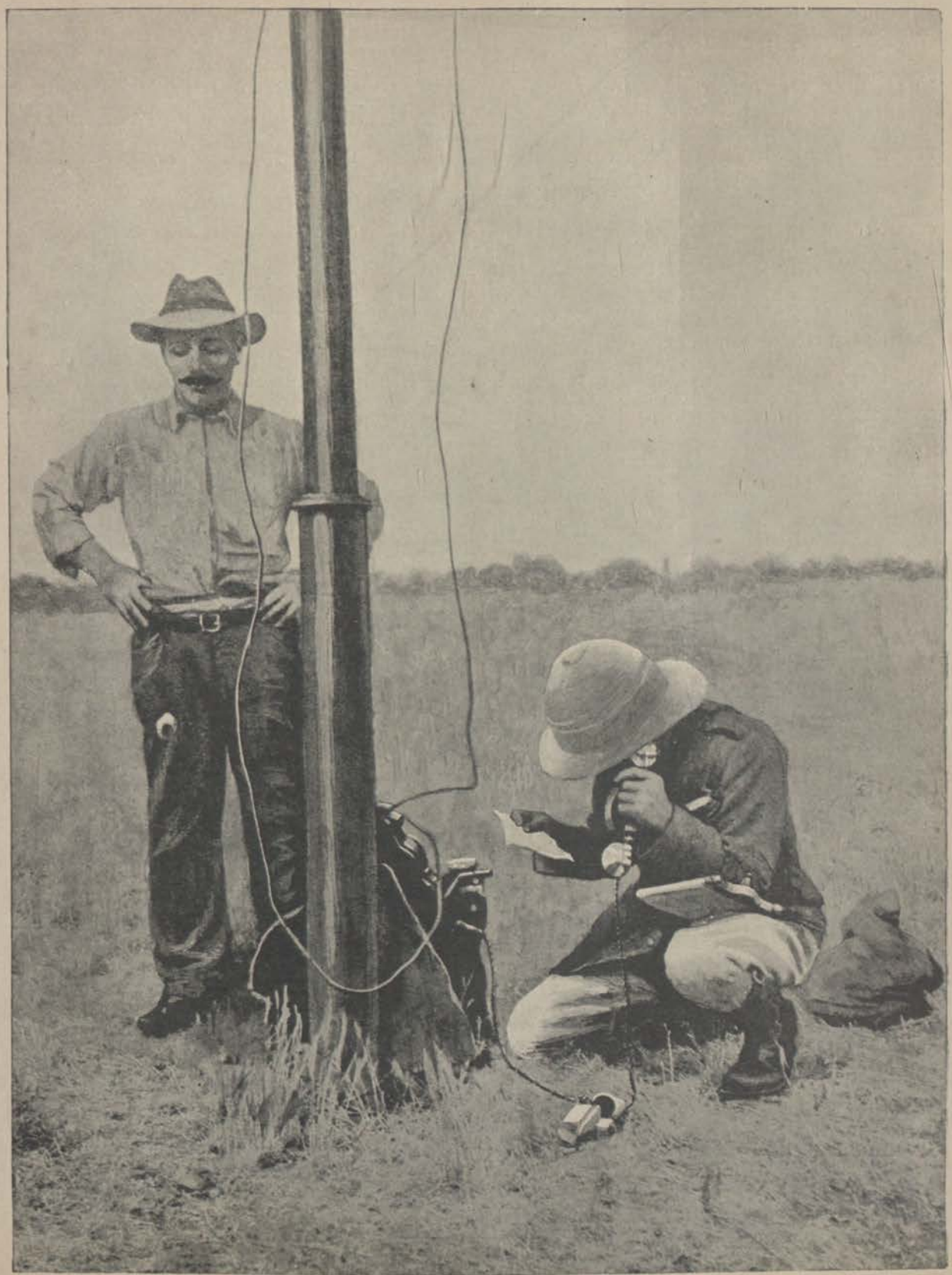
population was largely Dutch and therefore hostile, the great barrier of the Orange River was (the day after Buller's arrival) in the enemy's hands, and there was no immediate base so well provided for the support of an army as Kimberley.

Photograph by *Elliott and Fry*

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL LORD METHUEN, C.B., C.M.G., K.C.V.O.

The choice of the western line, though no official papers are forthcoming to enlighten us, was not, in our opinion, primarily due to the siege of Kimberley. The town held out for months, and that under far lighter privations than was the case with Ladysmith. Thanks to the timely preparations made by Colonel Kekewich and the large resources of which he was able to dispose, Kimberley was never in serious danger. The principal reason for Lord Methuen's advance was that Kimberley had been treated from the first as the main base for a British force operating offensively in the Free State. As was related in the preceding chapter, the Kimberley railway had been regarded as the chief line of communication before war broke out, and therefore before there was any question of relieving the town or the arrival of Cronje made the besieging force second only in importance to Joubert's army in Natal. The occupation of Kimberley would be a preliminary step to operations against Bloemfontein, towards Boshof or upon the rear of the Boers about Bethulie and Colesberg, and its relief and the defeat of the besieging force simply incidents in the execution of this occupation, however important their results. As a base Kimberley had many advantages. It was a large and wealthy town, well supplied, enthusiastically loyal, and in direct communication with Cape Town. Its possession, moreover, gave great scope for a flank attack on the enemy operating to the south-east against the heart of Cape Colony. The fact that Lord Roberts elected to follow the Kimberley route was a choice which, though partly due to the circumstances of the moment, confirms the impression that the experts were unanimous as to the superiority of the western line to the others.

Admitting this, it was most unfortunate that the circumstances called for a threefold division of the forces on the Orange River. Want of men rendered a general offensive along the frontier dangerous, so that theoretically it should have only been attempted at one point, the other wing standing on the defensive. But neither the generals nor our soldiers yet knew the full capacities of our enemy, and their main idea was to drive him from our territory. There was no question of awaiting large reinforcements, for they had not as yet been called out. The best had to be done with the few troops disposable, and that speedily.



THE FIELD TELEPHONE: COMMUNICATING WITH THE BASE FROM BELMONT

About the middle of November a telegram from General Buller announced that General Gatacre would land at East London with a battalion of the 7th Brigade, and on the 19th General French was reported to have gone to Naauwpoort with 1,000 men. Lord Methuen was on the Orange River, and was known to be organising a strong column. The general plan was now clear; the campaign was to commence with the relief of Kimberley and the expulsion of the Boers from the Colony, to be followed by a concentration of force somewhere in the Free State.

From the beginning of November to the commencement of Methuen's march, only one fight of importance had occurred between the Modder and the Orange River. Colonel Gough, who commanded the camp, moved out on November 9th to reconnoitre, taking with him two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, a battery of Field Artillery, and one and a half companies of Mounted Infantry belonging to the Northumberlands and Lancashires. He rode that day to Belmont but found no Boers, and encamped ten miles further back at Fincham's Farm, on the west of the railway. Next morning he moved to the north-west, and found the enemy in position on some high kopjes overlooking the plain across which he was advancing. As the object of the reconnaissance was to discover the enemy's strength, he resolved to draw their fire, and if possible to get a look at their laager. Accordingly he moved into the open with two troops of Lancers, dismounted the men at 1,400 yards' range, and opened a rattling fire, which extracted a hot reply. Five troop horses had been hit and one man slightly injured when our guns came into action behind the Cavalry and silenced the enemy's rifles. Meanwhile the Mounted Infantry endeavoured to work round the enemy's left flank. It was one of those occasions when the defence has every point in its favour, and the Boers made a good use of their advantages. Our troops suddenly found themselves under close range musketry fire, and the Northumberlands lost all their officers, Lieut.-Colonel Keith-Falconer being shot dead, and Lieutenants Bevan and Hall wounded. Lieutenant Wood of the North Lancashires was mortally wounded in the head, struck as he half rose to give an order. This deadly fusilade came from a few sharpshooters who after-

wards fell back on their main body. It now retired to a higher ridge, and the British force being too weak to attack it, returned to camp after a three hours' engagement. Except for the four officers mentioned, our losses were very slight. The enemy were estimated at 700 men and one gun. It was the first serious skirmish the men had had, and the whole force acquitted itself well, though it was unable to inflict much damage on its opponents.

The latter fought under the cover of far sweeping stony ridges, cleft into deep hollows and continuously flanked by succeeding kopjes, a very paradise for Boer tactics. Several men had close escapes, but that of Lieutenant Brook surpassed them all. That officer had ridden forward with a party of Lancers, and leaving his men had gone on to sketch the position by himself. Sending back his report by an orderly, he advanced alone into the hills and was fired on. His horse was shot and he had to run for his life. He would soon have been caught had he not come upon a wire fence which the Boer ponies could not cross. Their riders now sat down and began taking pot-shots at his retreating figure. By extraordinary luck they missed him and he was finally met and taken off by his own regiment.

Three days after Colonel Gough's fight Lord Methuen reached Orange River Camp, and took over the command. Masses of mules and stores of all kinds had now been collected, and the troops who were to use them were moving up fast. The General had, however, resolved that as far as possible the force should resemble a flying column, and when on the night of November 20th he ordered the troops to be ready to march, all spare baggage, such as tents, extra clothing, &c., were left behind, and the men started in the lightest possible kit. At daybreak on the 21st, after a night of chilly expectation, the march began.

The column consisted of the Guards Brigade, four battalions,[1] under Sir Henry Colvile, the 9th Brigade[2] under Major-General Featherstonhaugh, the 9th Lancers, two batteries of Field Artillery,[3]

[1] 1st and 2nd Coldstreams, 3rd Grenadiers, and 1st Scots Guards.

[2] 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Northamptons, 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, four companies Loyal North Lancashires, two companies 1st Royal Munsters.

[3] 18th and 75th.

and Rimington's Guides. This excellent corps, which afterwards came to be known as "Rimington's Tigers" from the strip of tiger-skin they carried in their hats, was made up entirely of men specially

THE ADVANCE OF THE "DUST DEVIL"

acquainted with the country, the condition of service being that each trooper should possess accurate knowledge of a different portion, so that, whatever the locality, there should never be any want of an expert guide. Even with these advantages however they were not

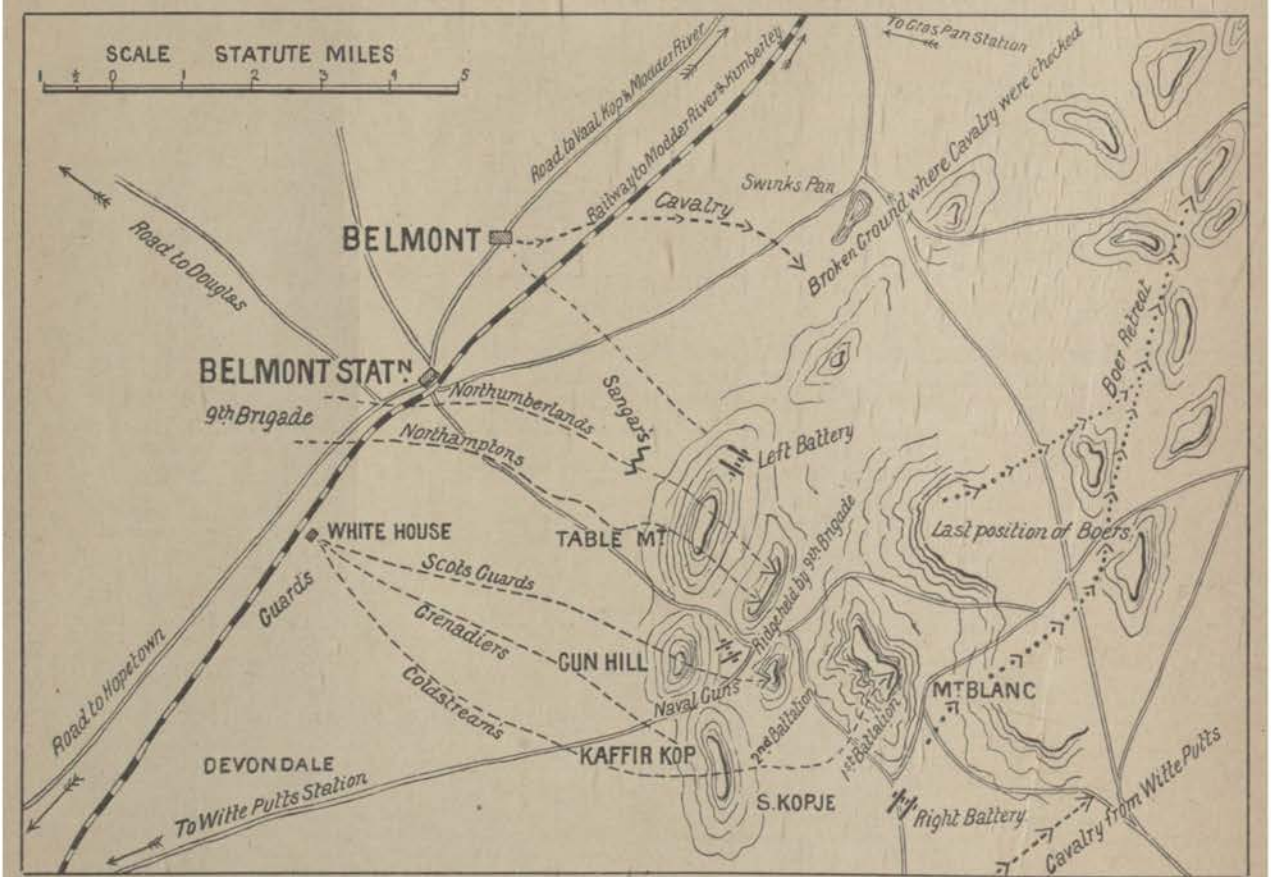
always a match for the cunning of their foe. The whole numbered some 7,000 infantry, with 250 sabres, besides the Guides and the guns. The column with the waggons was seven miles long. Eager and confident, battalion after battalion swept past the General and disappeared amongst the rolling hollows of the plain, now golden in the intense glare of an African morn.

The march that day covered fourteen miles of yellow scrub-land and strong kopjes, arid, monotonous, and desolate. After halting for the night at Fincham's Farm, the column made a short advance to Thomas's Farm, on the Hopetown Road, some miles south-west of Belmont. A cavalry reconnaissance came under shell-fire near Belmont Station, and a brief artillery duel ensued between one of our batteries and a powerful gun on a hill to the east, hence known as Gun Kopje. Under cover of this cannonade the enemy's position was as far as possible located, and Lord Methuen, seeing that he could not leave such a force on his flank, determined to attack it next day.

Looking eastward from the Orange River road he could see the grim, silent hills, rolling in broken and sinister outline away to the north, at an average distance of three miles from the railway. He resolved to turn the Boer position on its right or northern flank, afterwards pushing his own right against its front. He thus hoped to intercept the enemy's retreat towards the Modder, and to avoid the heavy losses which would be the inevitable consequences of a frontal attack unaided by a preliminary movement upon his flank and rear. In order to made the victory still more decisive and to diminish the cost the General issued orders for a night march, so as to arrive unnoticed within easy reach of the hills with the first glimmer of dawn. He intended that his left wing should do the main part of the work, the right seizing Gun Kopje and acting as a pivot.

By dusk on the 22nd the troops were massed north and south of Belmont, the 9th Brigade to the left, the Guards to the right. The latter were to reach a white house on the railway at 3 a.m., the former to be west of Table Mountain at the same hour. The line was then to advance eastwards, the left in front, the flank of the 9th Brigade under Featherstonhaugh being covered by two squadrons of Lancers, one

company Mounted Infantry, and a field battery moving north of Belmont Station. The Guards Brigade was to take Gun Kopje, having the Naval Brigade, which had just arrived after a long and harassing march, on its right. With General Colvile went the other field battery,[1] and, far to the right from Witteputts, a squadron of Lancers with a company of Mounted Infantry and Rimington's Guides were to move north-eastward to strike the enemy on his left flank. This great



THE BATTLE OF BELMONT, NOVEMBER 23, 1899

width of frontage was in Lord Methuen's opinion necessitated by the mobility of the Boers, and also probably by his uncertainty as to their exact position.

At dusk the troops left their bivouacs and marched towards their points of rendezvous, but the Guards, thanks to a miscalculation of

[1] The two with Methuen were the 75th and 18th. The position of each is not stated in the report.

THE BATTLE OF BELMONT, NOVEMBER 23, 1899

distance, arrived half an hour late. This was unfortunate, for by the time the Brigade had got within charging distance, the grey of dawn was yielding to the distinctness of day, and the chances of surprise, at no time very great, were destroyed.

For one silent hour the Guards pushed on through the low bush, the Grenadiers in front, the Scots Guards echeloned to their left rear, the Coldstreams in reserve. Now an important blunder occurred. Lieut.-Colonel Crabbe lost his direction and mistaking in the darkness a hill on his right front for Gun Hill, which he had been ordered to seize, got too far to the south. The Scots Guards moved up into the gap left by the Grenadiers, and directly fronted Gun Hill, towards which they marched. The result of the undue extension to the right was that the Guards Brigade found itself committed to an extensive frontal attack instead of waiting for the outflanking movement of the 9th Brigade.

At length just as the sun showed itself over the eastern hills, the front line got within 300 yards of the trenches of the enemy. Orders were issued to withhold fire and charge with the bayonet. The pace quickened, and as the Grenadiers dashed on, a shell from the right battery announced the presence of the artillery. Then from the apparently untenanted hills burst a fierce storm of fire. "At that minute," says Mr. Julian Ralph, "there ran along the crest of the great southernmost kopje a thin line of fire-jets—like jewels flashing in a coronet on the hill's brow." The rim of fire-beads raced along the sky-line, died away, and again sparkled forth. The trenches and sangars were outlined with the blaze of musketry, and a sheet of lead fell full into the ranks of the Grenadiers. Raked in flank from Gun Hill and in front from the southern kopje, the Guardsmen did not waver. Throwing in a few hurried volleys they dashed forward and getting under cover of the boulders fought their way upwards and drove the enemy out. In those few brief minutes they had lost 117 men killed and wounded, and ten officers.

Meanwhile on their left the Scots Guards cleared Gun Hill in the same brilliant fashion, though the opposition was far less stubborn. The battalion was reformed on the Nek between the two hills, while the Grenadiers were drawn southwards and descended into the valley

BLUEJACKETS OF H.M.S. *MONARCH* IN ACTION

between the height they had taken and Mount Blanc. What became of them afterwards we do not know. Probably their severe losses, especially in officers, induced the General to halt them and leave the further fighting to the Coldstreams and Scots Guards.

Meanwhile the left wing had been engaged in some hard fighting to the north. It had moved off at 3.7 a.m. in column of companies, the Northumberlands to the left, the Northamptons to the right, the Yorkshire Light Infantry and Munsters in second line. The railway crossed, the leading companies extended and began to drive the enemy's outposts back on their main position. Not, however, with impunity; for when close to Table Mountain the Northumberlands were sharply checked by a heavy fire from some sangars. The Northamptons, however, pushed forward on the right, outflanked the enemy, and forced them to retire. The advance was continued, and soon after Table Mountain was carried with little loss, both battalions halting on the summit to await the artillery.

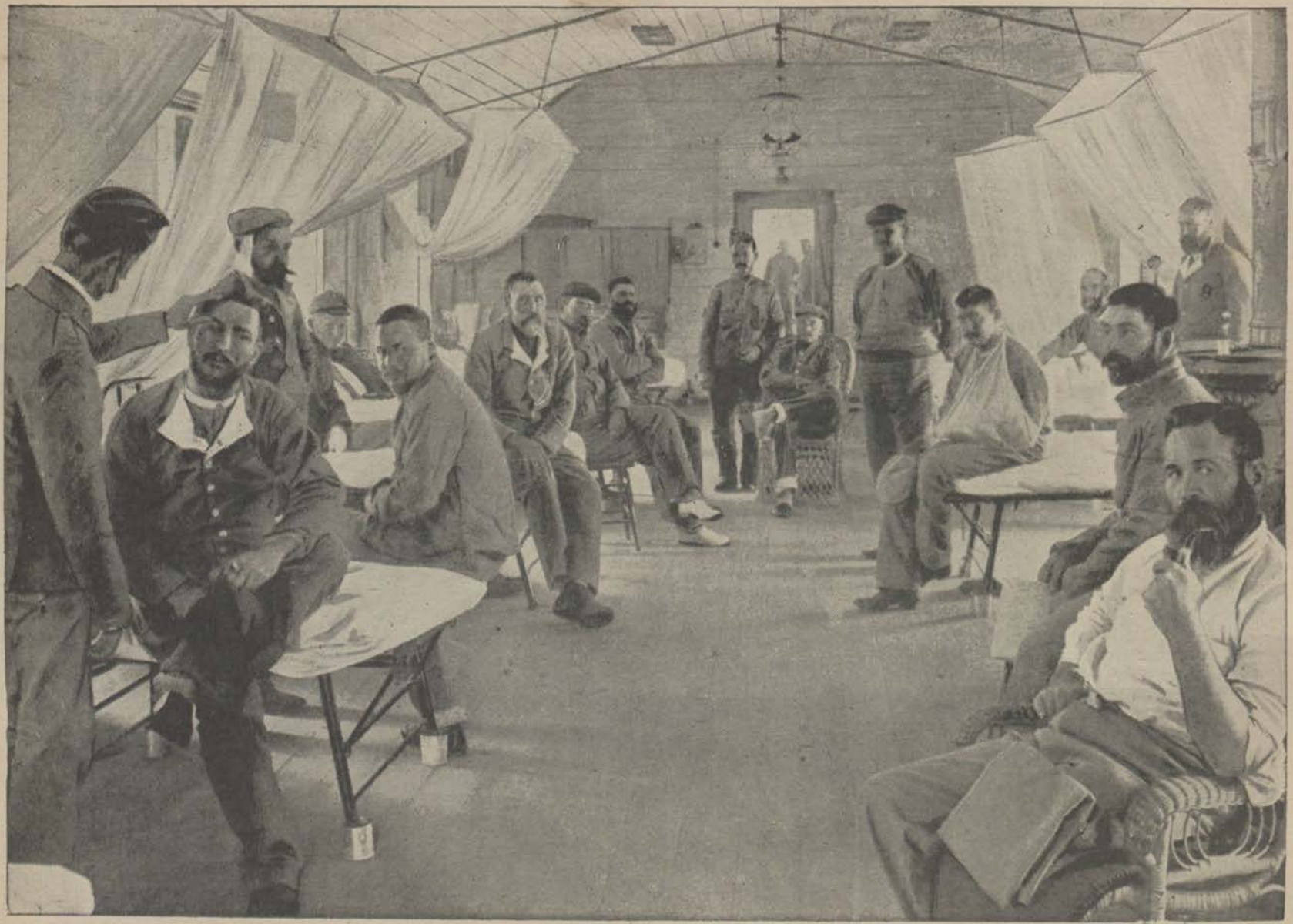
The battery came up and a heavy fire was poured upon the succeeding hills, along whose irregular crests the Boers lay thickly, shooting fast into our infantry. Featherstonhaugh's line found itself enfiladed from a ridge to the south, and thither the Northamptons and part of the Northumberlands were sent. More than seize and hold it they could not do, for the Yorkshires and Munsters had been ordered by Lord Methuen to conform to the Guards and had left their own brigade, thus depriving it of its reserve. We must suppose that the British General, seeing his right wing so heavily engaged, thought better to call part of his left to its support rather than persevere with his original plan. As a matter of fact, the Yorkshires were hardly brought into action, their loss being only five wounded. By weakening his left Lord Methuen withdrew his troops from the most important strategical point, and thereby rendered an effective blow against his enemy's communications impossible. This change which took place about five o'clock turned the fight into a simple frontal attack, and, when later on the moment for cavalry action arrived, deprived that arm of the assistance which a decisive success of the 9th Brigade would have afforded.

THE VERANDAH OF THE OFFICERS' HOSPITAL AT WYNBERG

Without reserves and deprived of their brigadier, for Major-General Featherstonhaugh was shortly afterwards wounded in the shoulder, the old "Fighting Fifth" and its companion clung stubbornly to the ridge though raked from their left flank as well as from a hill in front. The Boer fire was effective enough though the range was 1,000 yards, and for some time our men made no attempt to gain ground. At last about six o'clock a gallant rush with the bayonet cleared the heights from which the bullets had come, the enemy suffering considerably under a close and vindictive fusilade as they fled down the reverse slope. This ended the fight in that quarter. The morning's work had cost the two battalions six officers and over sixty men killed and wounded, the Northumberlands bearing three-fourths of the loss.

By this time the Coldstreams, to whom had been allotted the hill taken at such a heavy loss by the Grenadiers, were also advancing. Once again the over extension to the right upset the original plan, the first battalion coming under fire from Mount Blanc, though the error was brilliantly retrieved by Colonel Codrington, who promptly carried that important position with slight loss. Part of the second battalion shared his attack, part moved to the left at Sir Henry Colvile's orders, and assisted the Scots Guards to carry a hill south-west of Mount Blanc. By half-past five the left front of the enemy's position had been stormed at the cost of about 200 officers and men, two-thirds of whom had fallen in the first rush of the Grenadiers. This splendid battalion had drawn the whole weight of the Boer fire upon itself, and, according to one account, far from surprising the enemy, had been itself surprised in too close a formation. The discomfiture of the enemy opposed to the Guards was completed by the artillery, who shelled them out of some heights east of Mount Blanc, the Naval Brigade, after a most trying march with their unwieldy guns, getting a large share in this last success.

At 6.10 a.m., according to Lord Methuen's despatch, the last height had been cleared and the enemy were flying across his front about 3,000 yards off. Now was the moment for the mounted troops and the artillery to strike in and complete the defeat. Such a movement would have made Belmont more decisive than Elandslaagte, for the day



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WOUNDED BOER PRISONERS IN THE HOSPITAL AT WYNBERG

was still young, and an adequate force of cavalry and horse artillery would have cut off almost the entire commando. But the horses were utterly exhausted, and parties of Boers occupied kopjes between the Lancers and their retiring waggons. With so weak a mounted corps nothing could be done, and Colonel Gough was compelled to give up the pursuit. The enemy retreated northwards, though not without heavy losses. Eighty-three were found dead on the field, more than fifty were taken prisoners, amongst them a German officer and six field-cornets, and twenty wounded were brought to the British hospital. A considerable quantity of ammunition, sixty-four waggons, and 100 horses fell into our hands, together with much cattle and forage. Our infantry halted to collect the wounded and then returned to camp, which was reached at 10.30 a.m. So perfect were Colonel Townsend's ambulance arrangements that by 1 p.m. all the wounded were receiving careful attention, and by 5 p.m. next day were travelling southward, the less severely injured to the Orange River, the graver cases to Cape Town.

The fight at Belmont is an interesting illustration of the difficulties which our Generals had at first to encounter, and of the need of a wide margin for possible error. The British commander's plan of striking the decisive blow with his left was reasonable enough, but its successful execution depended on the accurate performance of a very extensive movement under very difficult conditions. In the first place, a night march, as every one knows, is an extremely critical operation, especially when carried out on a very wide front and through unknown country. In the second place, the enemy's position was inaccurately known, and the hills behind it could not even be reconnoitred. In the third place, the want of mounted troops sorely weakened the General's hands. Experience showed that horsemen alone could cope with the tactical mobility of the enemy. "He changes flank in fifteen minutes," said Lord Methuen. Wishing to give the enemy no time to manœuvre, he advanced under cover of night, and had no recourse to artillery preparation. He trusted mainly to the tactics of Telekebir. And it must be admitted, considering the circumstances, that with the exception of the Grenadiers, the casualties were

slight. The brilliant effort of Crabbe's battalion augmented our losses by more than two-thirds. It was a brief and very bloody episode in a comparatively bloodless engagement. Perhaps it unfairly biassed the critics as to the general conduct of the fight. At the same time, though the main loss was primarily due to the error of direction, it seems clear that Lord Methuen was incorrectly informed of the enemy's position. He appears to have calculated on seizing Gun Kopje first, and then awaiting the advance of his left. Probably it would have been better not to have engaged the Guards at all till the flank movement had plainly taken effect. Probably, too, the whole force should have struck further north so as to have ensured the interception of the Boer retreat. But these are mere after-criticisms; and even had the General moved as suggested, the enemy's knowledge of his movements and superior mobility might have enabled them to forestall him.

As it was he found the Boers occupying a position of immense length and strength. Thanks to the dash of our soldiers they were driven from it in an incredibly short time. There were no preparatory movements; the troops went straight at what lay in their front when the sun rose. In one hour and a half the fight was over, several lines of kopjes, held by 2,000 Boers, had been carried, each by a separate struggle, in which the defenders had no chance against the British soldier, and made no prolonged effort to resist him. The bravery of the enemy was sullied by deliberate acts of treachery, Lieutenant Blundell and Lieut.-Colonel Crabbe both being struck by shots from Boers who had surrendered or shown the white flag. The large number of dead enemies found on the field was almost certainly due to the free employment of the bayonet, some of them crouching to the last amid the boulders, and having literally to be dug out with that terrible weapon.

ROYAL ASIATIC

CHAPTER XI

GRASPAN

THE MARCH TO SWINKSPAN—THE BIVOUAC—THE ENEMY'S POSITION—THE CANNONADE—NAVAL GUNS—ATTACK OF NAVAL BRIGADE UPON THE GREAT KOPJE—YORKSHIRES' ADVANCE—THE RIDGE WON—RETREAT OF THE BOERS—CAVALRY ORDERED TO PURSUE—REMARKS ON THE BATTLE

FIERCE as had been the fighting at Belmont and exhausted as were the troops, Lord Methuen paused not a day in his advance. On the afternoon of November 24th he received information that 400 Boers with two guns were on the line near Graspan, a station seven miles to the north of his camp. Once more he determined to attack. The 9th Brigade and the Naval Brigade, who had suffered least in the struggle of the day before, were ordered to march to Swinkpsan, five miles north-east of Belmont station, so as to be within striking distance of the enemy's most vulnerable point, his left flank. With this column rode Rimington's Guides and the Lancers. The Guards were to move along the railway acting as escort to the baggage and ready to give assistance when and where required. With them went the naval guns and the armoured train; the 75th and 18th Batteries moved with Colonel Money, now commanding the 9th Brigade. His column, which had further to go than Colvile's men, started the same afternoon. It made a circuitous march to Swinkspan, skirting in its course the field of Belmont, still strewn with the wrecks of battle over which the aasvogels were restlessly wheeling. As the evening fell the troops reached their bivouac by the pool, which lay navelled in a circle of hills whose regularity of slope and form belied their volcanic origin. Picquets sent up to the surrounding heights came upon recent traces of Boer occupation, but no enemy was to be seen or heard. This intangibility of our foe was one of the grimmest features of the grim march

THE BOERS' METHOD OF DRAGGING GUNS UP KOPJES

now in progress. Less sturdy soldiers would have been overawed by this novel kind of warfare; but amongst Methuen's troops it aroused only a fierce desire to get to hand grips with their slippery opponents at all costs. Every march was made dangerous by the nature of the country and by our weakness in cavalry. Often the columns marched for miles between kopjes whose brown-bouldered crests might easily have concealed sharpshooters. But the Boers did not sufficiently utilise their advantages, and the marches as a rule were uneventful. It was in the actual battle that the enemy showed his extraordinary powers of concealment and surprise, cheating us into the belief that he had retreated, until a merciless fire disclosed his whereabouts when it was too late. The astounding hardihood of our infantry was rewarded by the capture of an empty ridge strewn with burnt cartridges, torn with shot, and spattered with blood; from the succeeding mound the same devilish fusilade was rained upon them by the same unseen hands and the dreadful task had to be repeated with the same barren result. Losses the Boers certainly suffered, but not such as to break their courage or weaken their endurance, and they fell back from ridge to ridge ever confident that a day would come when the foolhardy English advance would come to a standstill for want of men. Such in brief outline is the story of Lord Methuen's advance, which, as a display of energy, resolution, and reckless bravery, will not easily find its equal in the military records of our race.

The bivouac round Swinkspan was characteristic of the campaign. Travellers have told us of the weird fascination of the African night; the starry purple above, the long lines of the veldt, their harsh bareness softly concealed by the darkness, rolling dimly into the horizon, the swift chill and the ague-bringing mists that follow sunset, the bold upleaping of the merciless sun—these were the aspects of Nature which became most familiar to our soldiers as they pressed forward through the heart of the desert.

The rest in the hollow was short for the march was resumed at 3 a.m., Lord Methuen's intention being to reach the enemy soon after dawn.

Five miles over a waterless, slowly rising upland brought the

A MAXIM GUN IN ACTION

advanced troops of Money's column within sight of a line of kopjes about three miles beyond Graspan station. For a full hour the Naval Brigade and the Yorkshires had moved in fighting formation, the Lancers scouting ahead, Rimington's Guides watching the hills along the Free State frontier to the right. No Boers had been seen, though the whole movement had been carefully watched and a hot reception provided. Not till the troops got within long artillery range did the foe disclose his positions. He lay entrenched along a series of kopjes, his right resting on two knolls east and west of the railway, his left upon a high conical hill some three miles to the east. Behind the grassy ridges joining these higher points were placed several guns, and amongst their folds Boers could be seen swarming like bees towards the great eastern kopje on the possession of which the result of the fight appeared to depend. One of Money's field batteries went forward to shell this hill and the action commenced.

Meanwhile on the left, the Naval guns on the armoured train arrived within 5,000 yards of the Boer right. Only two guns were detrained, for there were not enough men to work the others. Lieutenant Dean then awaited the approach of the other field battery which was to assist him in shelling the kopjes above the railway. It was just six o'clock. Half an hour afterwards the field guns came up on the right of the Naval Battery, both opening fire at the same moment. They were protected by two companies of the Northumberlands, the rest of that battalion lining the slopes opposite the Boer right and centre, and connecting the artillery with the mass of Money's infantry which was now in position opposite the enemy's left. The movement had been carried out to the letter, but unfortunately the Boers had closely watched its development, and were quite alive to its significance. Leaving a thin screen to face our left and centre, the rest galloped to the eastern kopje, and to a line of hills which ran northwards from it. A new front was thus formed to meet our intended flank attack, and our initial advantage was completely nullified.'

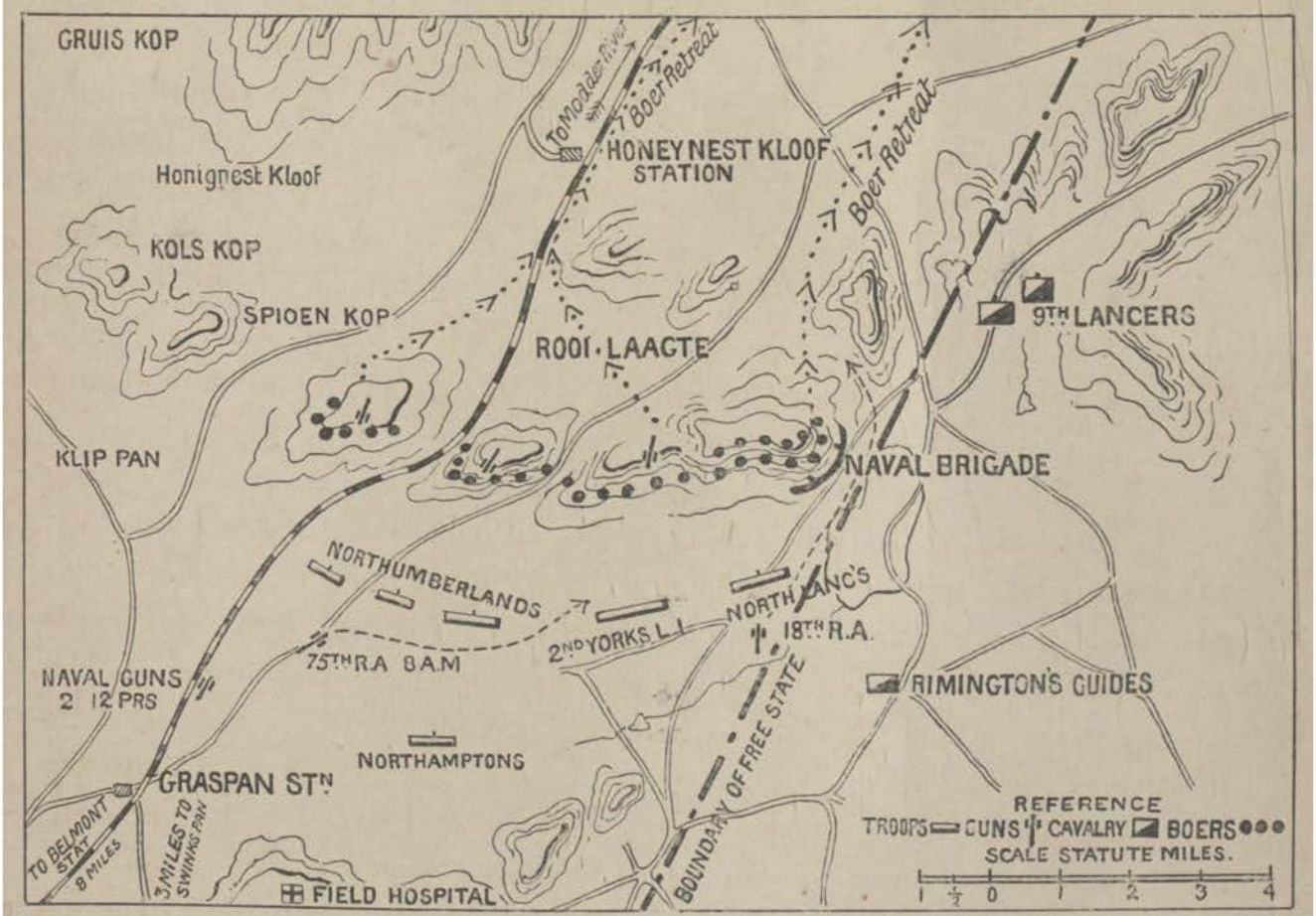
The English General so far discarded the tactics of Belmont that he now had resort to a lengthy artillery preparation. For nearly two hours the air was full of crossing shells, both sides firing

A TWELVE-POUNDER NAVAL GUN AND ITS COMPANY

heavily and with scarcely a pause. The Boer guns, six field, one Hotchkiss and one Maxim, were well hidden and excellently served. Covered by rocks and placed behind the crest line, they were quite invisible to our gunners, whose only mark was the thin film of smoke which floated into the air above them, and was at best an unreliable guide. One gun especially, placed in the centre of the grassy ridge, proved very difficult to silence, though our shrapnel fire was wonderfully accurate and vigorously sustained. Over and over again shells burst fairly above it, but its fire only abated temporarily. The men who worked the gun were directed by another, who stood boldly out upon the ridge observing our batteries and altering the direction and object of the fire as he judged best. Now the irrepressible weapon was turned on the line of guns, now on the ammunition waggons and horses standing far in the rear. Unlike the Boers in Natal, the enemy fired mainly shrapnel, spattering the guns with bullets, though failing seriously to damage them. "Their shells," said Lieutenant Dean, "burst with utmost accuracy, . . . but owing to my system of making all hands lie down when we saw their guns flash and remain till the shell burst and the balls flew by, we had only six men wounded when at 9.30 a.m. the Boers finally ceased firing and abandoned their position." The Naval guns, indeed, were fought with admirable resolution and courage. About eight o'clock the field battery, which had been in action on their right, was called away to co-operate in the grand attack upon the enemy's left, and it being thought that the two guns on the railway would be too weak to reply to the opposing fire Dean was ordered to withdraw. But the Boers had now got the range accurately, and were pouring a veritable hail of shot upon his pieces, for they were within 2,800 yards, and their position offered no cover. The gallant Lieutenant, fearing the losses that would ensue if any attempt was made to retire, judged it wiser to remain where he was, and commenced so vigorous a reply that the two guns upon the kopjes on each side the railway were frequently silenced, though never permanently put out of action. As we have said, the Naval guns more than held their own to the end of the fight.

Meanwhile things had been going very differently on the left.

The 18th Battery had been in action for nearly two hours when the 75th was called to its support, and opened a raking fire upon the great kopje and the guns near it. About the same time the Naval Brigade, consisting of about forty Bluejackets and 200 Marines, began to advance. They were in skirmishing order at four paces interval, Major Plumbe, R.M.L.I., in command on the left, Commander Ethelston, R.N., on the right, and Captain Prothero, R.N., in the centre. The little body



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF GRASPAN

of men pushed on to the right of the big kopje, so as to get well round its flank before they went in. There was no sign of the enemy; our shell fire appeared to have driven them out. Not a rifle spoke, not a gun answered. The Naval Brigade wheeled to the right and drew near the hill, moving over perfectly open ground and fully exposed. When they were 900 yards away a Lancer came galloping back, calling out as he passed, "You've got your work cut out to-day,

boys!" The advance was continued, the men drawing somewhat closer together as they converged upon the base of the mountain. They were now only 600 yards away, but still not a Boer was visible. Suddenly from every boulder and cranny came a blaze of musketry that covered the whole front of the hill, and a sheet of lead whistled through the ranks of the Marines. The men lay down, coolly firing volleys at the crest. But they were powerless to check the Boer fire, which increased in volume until, in the words of an eye-witness, "It looked as if the entire kopje was in a condition of eruption." So heavy was the storm of bullets that the line was hidden in the cloud of sand which they threw up. This state of affairs could not continue. Prothero determined to advance. "Men of the Naval Brigade, advance at the double; take that kopje and be hanged to it!" A rush was made to within 450 yards. Then all the terrors of their situation were let loose upon them. From the left flank among the spurs of the hill came a deadly enfilading fire, and the huddled groups of men wasted away before the merciless fusilade. Still rang out the order, "Advance!" Without a waver the survivors rose up and, wading knee-high through spurting dust, got within 200 yards from the base of the kopje. There was scarcely an officer remaining. Prothero had gone down wounded; Ethelston had fallen stone dead with a bullet in his heart. Nevertheless, when Major Plumbe sprang up and called on his Marines, not a man faltered. The brave officer had hardly covered half a dozen yards when he too sank lifeless to the ground, and Lieutenant Saunders of the *Powerful* dashed to the front and headed the onset. The Boers were now partially visible through the whirling sand as, leaning forward over their breastworks, they again and again emptied their magazines into the unconquerable men beneath them. But only those whom the bullets struck could be stopped. With an ominous ring of fixing bayonets the Marines reached the base of the hill, and lay for a few seconds gasping for breath among the boulders. Then with a stern shout of vengeance they rushed upwards. As at Talana, Elandslaagte, and Belmont, the enemy yielded to the moral suasion that "the strong, unwavering, bayonet charge" always bears with it. They left their sangars in haste, and fled across the plateau

THE BATTLE OF GRASPAN, NOVEMBER 25, 1899

behind the crest to a vantage ground in the rear, whence they renewed the fight. The Marines and Bluejackets walked unopposed into the position which it had cost them so much to gain, but it took a quarter of an hour to drive the Boers from their last rocks. Captain Le Marchant rallied all the men he could find and immediately led them on, pushing the enemy before him to the edge of the hills where the defence crumbled away, and the whole fled in confusion under the sharp fire of a few

A SOUVENIR OF THE BATTLE OF GRASPAN FOUND IN THE BOER CAMP

The officer who sent this sketch writes :—"This water-colour was picked up after the defeat of the Boers at the Battle of Graspan. It represents the Boer guns in position on the kopje which was charged by the Naval Brigade, and in which it lost so heavily. The plain below, bare and level, across which the British force advanced, is well shown, with small station of Graspan and the armoured train in advance. The sketch was evidently made by a Boer on the morning of the battle and thrown into an ambulance when they retreated."

Marines. So ended one of the most desperate attacks in the history of a war in which displays of reckless daring were rather the rule than the exception. In the few minutes the attack lasted the Naval Brigade lost six officers and ninety-nine men killed and wounded. Their greatest loss was occasioned by the flanking fire which struck them before they reached the base of the hill. Here the shower of bullets fell so thickly that men were hit several times before they reached

the ground. No doubt the tendency of the line to converge partly accounted for the loss, but this enfilading fire at short range would have told with terrible effect upon men in any formation. It is superfluous to expatiate on the coolness of the officers and the bravery of the men. Lieutenant Jones, R.M.L.I., was considered specially worthy of mention, even among such companions. He struggled to the top of the hill with a bullet in his thigh, nor would he allow his wound to be dressed until the victory was secure.

The honour of the assault was shared by two other corps, the Yorkshire Light Infantry and the North Lancashires. When the Boers opened upon the Naval Brigade, the former battalion rushed in, pouring a hail of shot upon the sangar, and apparently working towards the point whence the flanking fire had decimated their comrades. The two batteries were now hurling shrapnel upon the hill with great speed and precision, two, three, or four shells bursting simultaneously on the very crest of the ridge. Swiftly the long skirmishing line of the Yorkshires pushed on, and their efforts, together with those of the North Lancashires and the artillery, considerably diminished the resistance of the defenders. Line after line came into action, the foremost running up the hillside, the rearmost preventing the enemy from firing off the breastworks. When the Boers retreated to their last position the Yorkshires gained the summit, and despite a savage cross-fire from the kopjes on the left, put the remaining foes to flight. The battalion had fifty-three casualties, the North Lancashires twenty.

Their position turned, the enemy retired in great confusion, the British batteries hurrying round their left flank and pouring shell upon their retreating masses. But the cavalry were again prevented, owing to their weakness in numbers and to the exhausted condition of men and horses, from pressing the pursuit. Parties of the enemy took up detached stations along the kopjes in rear, and by a heavy fire checked any attempt to reach their main body. The Lancers had several men wounded by a sudden fusilade from two knolls between which they were passing, and had to fall back. Rimington's Guides were not present during the action, being engaged in watching a strong body of Boers who were threatening Methuen's right rear two miles further back.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD KIN

By eleven o'clock the last of the Boers had passed out of shell range, and the fight, which, with sufficient cavalry and horse artillery, should have ended in the capture of the enemy, closed without decisive result. Their loss is not accurately known. Lord Methuen buried twenty-one; thirty more were found wounded in a hospital. Probably a larger number were carried off. There is no reason to believe that they suffered more heavily than ourselves.

The Guards Brigade arrived just as the action ended, and did not fire a shot. The wounded had been removed and cared for, thanks once more to the great energy and organising power of Colonel Townsend. The whole of the force bivouacked at Enslin.

Except for the terrible struggle of the Naval Brigade and the Yorkshires, Graspan was an artillery battle. Our right battery fired 500 rounds of shrapnel, our left 210. This great expenditure of ammunition had no commensurate effect. The enemy lay well under cover, and only came to the ridge line to repel our infantry. Every stone on the summit of the great hill was splashed with shrapnel bullets, but the Boers on the opposite slope were comparatively secure. The theory of shaking infantry with artillery fire no longer holds good when the shells cannot reach them. It was only in the last few minutes, when the sangar was crowded with riflemen firing at our infantry, that the shells can have done considerable material damage. The result was that the Naval Brigade fell into a trap. We had not yet learnt that invisibility was no proof of absence. As an English officer remarked, "We attacked the enemy first, and then found out his position."[1] It was no bad comment upon Graspan and Belmont. The next three weeks were to supply other such examples, and on a more costly scale.

[1] Kinnear, "With Methuen to the Modder," p. 99.

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF MODDER RIVER

METHUEN'S ADVANCE TO HONEYNEST KLOOF—HIS RECONNAISSANCE ON THE MODDER—BOERS INVISIBLE—RESOLVES TO OUTFLANK SPYTFONTEIN POSITION BY JACOBSDAL—NEWS THAT THE ENEMY ARE ON THE MODDER—CHANGE OF PLAN—BOER POSITION—ADVANCE OF ENGLISH CAVALRY—SKIRMISH—ARTILLERY DUEL—ARRIVAL OF INFANTRY—ORDERS TO ADVANCE IN SKIRMISHING ORDER—TREMENDOUS FIRE OPENED ON GUARDS—THE BRIGADE CHECKED—EFFORT OF CODRINGTON TO CROSS THE RIET—STATE OF THE FIGHT ON THE RIGHT WING—THE POMPOM—SPLENDID EFFORTS OF OUR ARTILLERY—THE 75TH—IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTILLERY FIRE—ADVANCE OF THE 9TH BRIGADE—SUCCESSFUL ATTACK—FAILURE OF FREE STATERS—RIVER CROSSED—ATTEMPTS TO GAIN GROUND ON NORTH BANK—END OF THE BATTLE—CRONJE'S RETREAT—GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

WHATEVER faults might be imputed to Lord Methuen as a general, want of energy was hardly one of them. The day after Graspan was spent in repose, but on the 27th, after the wounded had been despatched south, the advance was recommenced, and by midday the column had reached a point about eight miles south of Modder River, where the muddy pools of Honeynest Kloof afforded a convenient halting place. Here the camp remained till the next morning, and the General uncertain as to the whereabouts of the enemy, rode forward himself to reconnoitre.

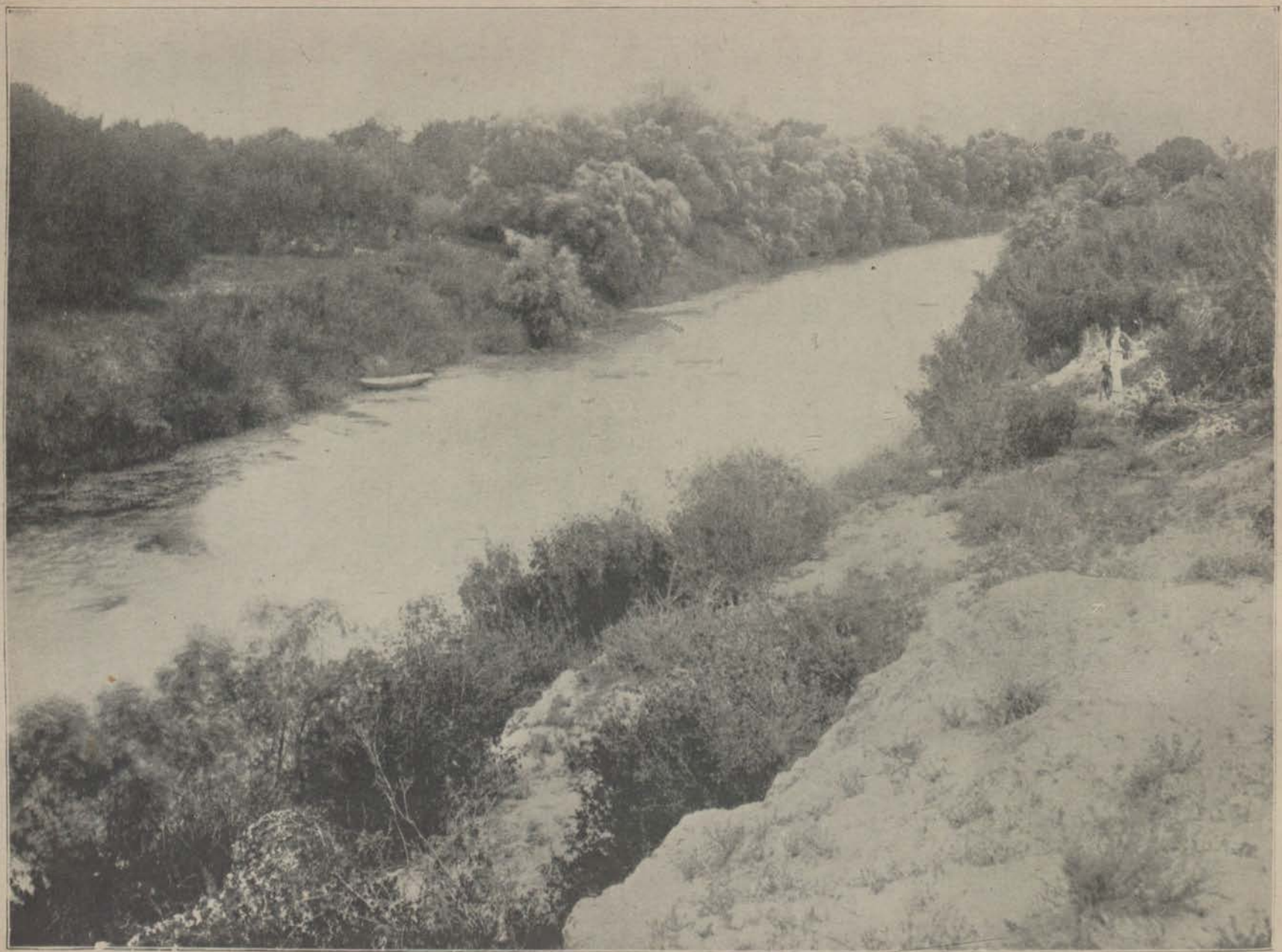
A Rimington scout, who had come in to report that he had been fired on from an apparently empty cottage, had put Lord Methuen on the alert, and somewhat shaken his belief in the story of the spies who asserted that the Boers had abandoned the river and were massing to oppose him on the Spytfontein kopjes. With a couple of staff officers the British commander advanced to within a few hundred yards of the Modder, but saw nothing in the thickly foliaged banks to arouse his suspicions. No Boers or earthworks were visible; the few grazing horses augered the presence of a party of scouts. Beyond the stream rose up the blue hills that barred the road to Kimberley, and upon

which, as the probable scene of the coming battle, the eyes of the General were now fixed. Satisfied that the enemy had no large force upon the river, either to guard the passage or to strike southwards, he returned to camp, resolved to leave the railway under the protection of a detachment, and crossing the Riet and the Modder near Jacobsdal, to attack the Boers in their left flank. It was in the main to be the same operation that General French carried out ten weeks later. But Methuen was not destined to attempt it, for before the march of the next day began the information that the Modder village was strongly held caused him to change his plans.

The fact that the Boers commanded the passage made at once the intended march a dangerous undertaking, for by moving on Jacobsdal the British column would expose its flank and line of supply, to say nothing of the thousand men it was proposed to leave behind to cover the railway. Long before Methuen's infantry, moving on the arc of the circle could cross the river and threaten the Spytfontein position, the Boers on their hardy ponies could pass the Modder and force on an engagement which might end in the English division being driven away from its communication into a waterless desert of kopjes. Naturally enough the General refused to take the risk, and determined to seize the Modder passage before proceeding further.

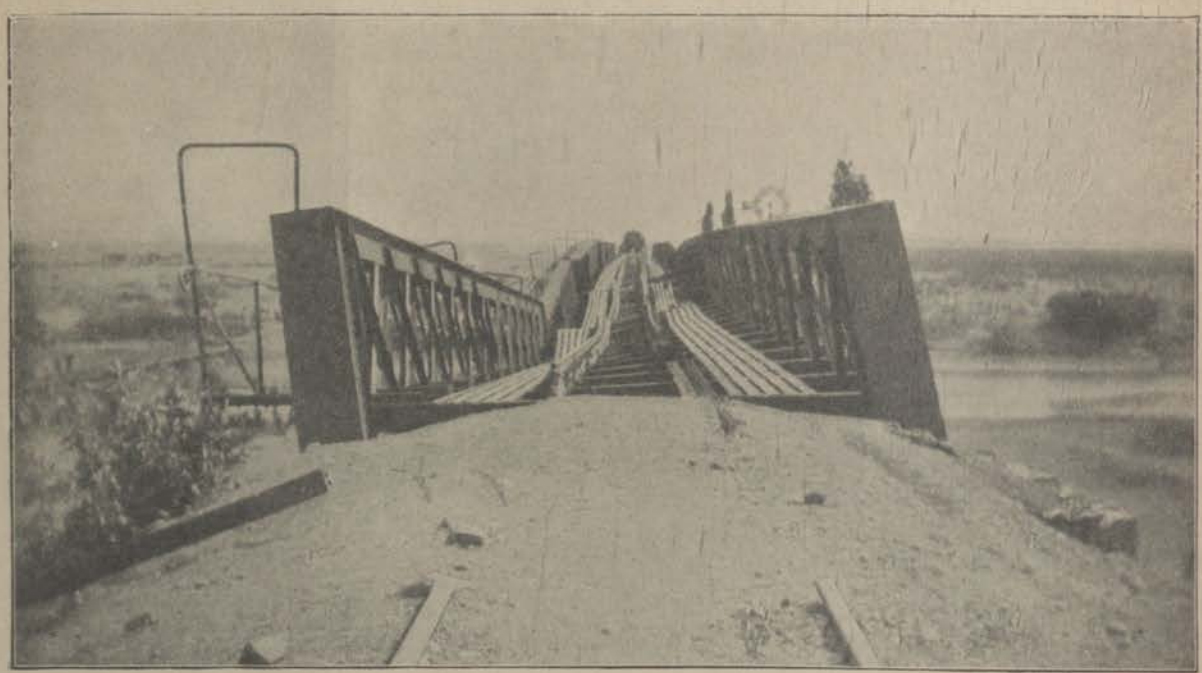
No one had any idea that the whole of the Boer force was carefully entrenched upon the banks east and west of Modder village. The position which Cronje, fresh from his discomfiture before Mafeking, had taken up was very strong. The Modder,[1] at the time of the battle, was about as wide as the Thames at Wallingford, and though not deep, was only fordable in a very few places. It was fringed with masses of trees and thick bush, which effectually screened anything along the banks. A mile below the railway bridge the river had been dammed, so as to form a wide lagoon dotted with islets covered with willows, poplars and acacias. The village itself, lying

[1] We have here retained the popular nomenclature. In the official maps the combined stream of Riet and Modder is called the Riet. In the following pages we shall refer to it as the Modder, the name of Riet referring to the southern river above its junction with the Modder.



THE MODDER RIVER

on the northern bank, had grown to be the favourite watering-place of Kimberley, to which it stood much in the same relation as Maidenhead does to London. The river front is a line of hotels and gardens hedged in with cactus, and rich with flowering mimosa. In the rear of the houses the ground rose gently to the northward. This bright little oasis Cronje had now turned into a field fortress. His right extended a mile and half to the west of the bridge, the left two miles to the east, curving round along the Riet so as to enfilade any force approaching the village. Both banks had been scientifically entrenched



THE BRIDGE OVER THE MODDER DESTROYED BY THE BOERS

so as to command a wide zone of fire. The willow beds of the Riet, the tongue of land running up to the junction of the rivers, the houses, stone enclosures, and bridges of the villages, the scattered mud-huts upon the southern bank, and the thick, luxuriant masses of vegetation along the course of the Modder were crowded with riflemen, seamed with trenches, and pitted with gun emplacements. These last were a special feature of Albrecht's works, and were so constructed and connected that the movement of pieces during the progress of an action was made perfectly easy and safe. As soon as our artillery fire grew

VIEW FROM THE MODDER RIVER RAILWAY BRIDGE LOOKING EAST. THE RIET IS ON THE RIGHT

too heavy the gun was dragged to another pit, while we were congratulating ourselves on having silenced it. On the hills behind the village were placed several guns of large calibre, which outranged all the British artillery except the naval twelve-pounders.

While, then, the Boers held a strip about four miles long, and four or five hundred yards broad, consisting partly of artificial, partly of natural cover, the ground upon the English side was bare of everything except anthills, and sloped gently towards the rivers, leaving everything absolutely exposed to fire, a fact which quite outweighed its slightly superior elevation. The Boers possessed all the conditions of success. They were to fight in elaborately prepared field works, or amongst jungle, which rendered them invisible if not invulnerable; the open plain beyond gave the flat trajectory of the Mauser an ideal field of fire, the distances being carefully measured and marked with whitened stones; while their main line was protected by the river from the terrors of the bayonet charge, the last and most dreaded resource of the British soldier.

The right of the position, west of the railway bridge, was held by the Free Staters, the left by the Transvaalers under Delarey. Cronje himself was reported to have been at the tip of the horn upon the Riet, ready to strike in on the flank when the proper time arrived. His entire force probably did not number more than 6,000 men, though Lord Methuen places the total at 8,000. The volume of bullets that can be poured from magazine rifles is naturally very apt to lead to exaggeration in this respect.

The news of the occupation of Modder village only partially undeceived the English General. Though the fact of the Boers' presence on the river induced him to change his plans and cover his communications, he expected nothing more than a rearguard action, and did not alter his opinion until the whole Boer line opened fire. He started at 4 a.m. with the mounted troops, the artillery and infantry following. In two hours the advanced guard came into sight of the Modder, and into touch with a strong and aggressive body of Boers on the extreme right. In the village itself there was no sign of the enemy. Cronje was endeavouring to lure his opponent into the angle of the

A BOER COMPANY READY TO FIRE

Riet, the strongest part of his position, and allow him thoroughly to commit himself there, before he unmasked to his right and centre along the Modder.

The ruse succeeded. The Lancers followed the party toward the willow-beds, and the 18th and 75th Batteries followed the cavalry, coming into action about seven o'clock at 3,000 yards' range, and chasing the enemy out of some advanced posts along the river bank. About this time the Lancers made an attempt to cross the stream but were driven back by superior rifle fire, and remained stationary for the rest of the day, covering the right flank and rear. Three Boer guns now disclosed themselves, and a duel between the rival artilleries filled up the interval between the cavalry skirmish and the approach of the infantry. One of the enemy's guns was eventually disabled, and with a stronger force of cavalry Lord Methuen thought he might have secured it.

So far, though totally misled as to the whereabouts and strength of the enemy, he had committed himself to nothing. He had ordered his infantry to advance in extended order upon a very wide front so as to be ready to act, but none of it was in action, and there was still time to decide upon the point and method of attack. But the General formed his opinion upon false data. In the first place, he and all around him believed that the Boers they had seen were merely a rear-guard; in the second, he was convinced that the position could not be turned by a wide detour. Probably, too, he felt that if the enemy were a mere rearguard such a movement would be merely loss of time. Certainly the line was tactically "turnable," as the issue proved.

The two brigades came up and received immediate orders to advance. The Guards Brigade moved east of the line, and was directed to develop its attack first, the Scots Guards on the right flank swinging round so as to outflank the enemy's left. On their left marched the Grenadiers, and next to them the 2nd Coldstreams. The 1st Coldstreams were in reserve in rear of the Scots Guards. The 9th Brigade prolonged the line to the left, the Northumberlands, supported by half a battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, being next to the 2nd Coldstreams on the east of the line; west of it were the

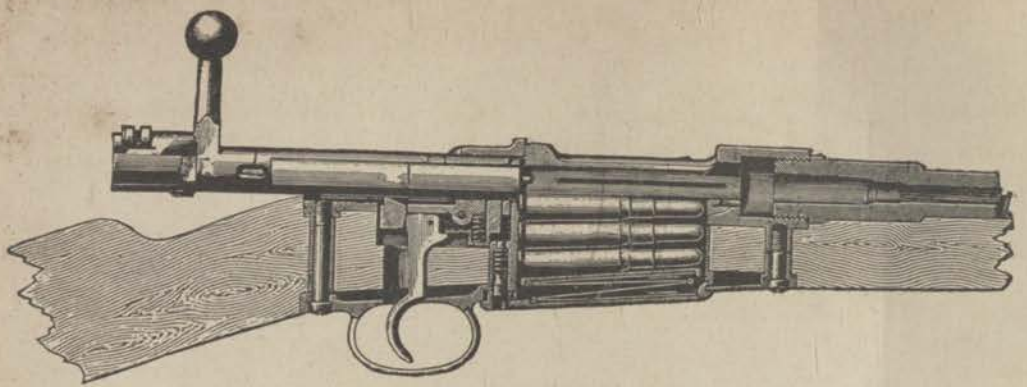


FIG. 1. THE NEW MAUSER RIFLE

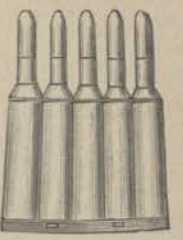


FIG. 2. MAUSER CARTRIDGES IN LOADING STRIP

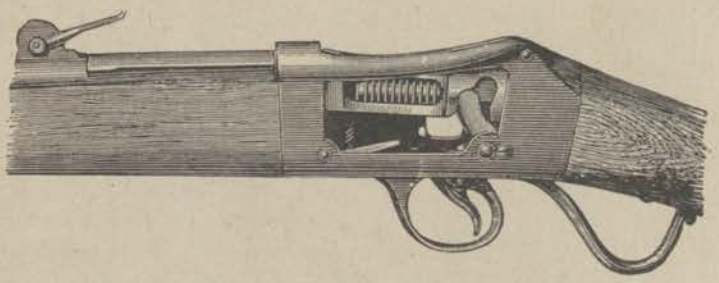


FIG. 3. THE MARTINI-HENRY, LOADED

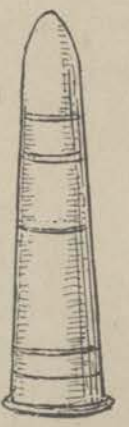


FIG. 5. MARTINI-HENRY CARTRIDGE

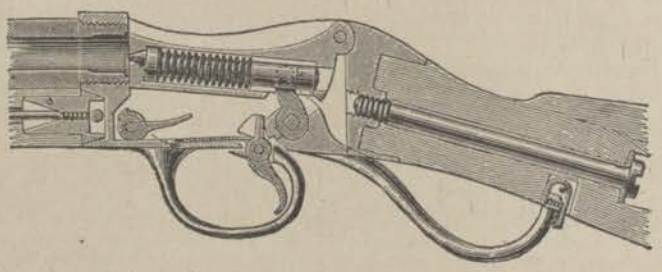


FIG. 4. THE MARTINI-HENRY, FIRED

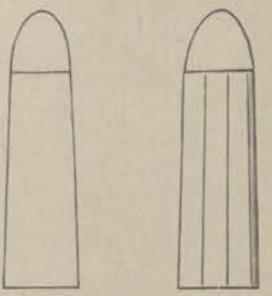


FIG. 7. DUMDUM BULLETS WITH AND WITHOUT SLITS

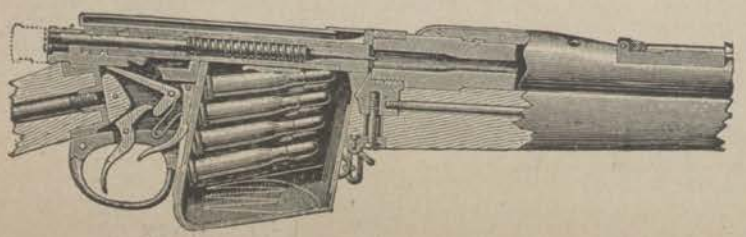


FIG. 6. THE LEE-METFORD

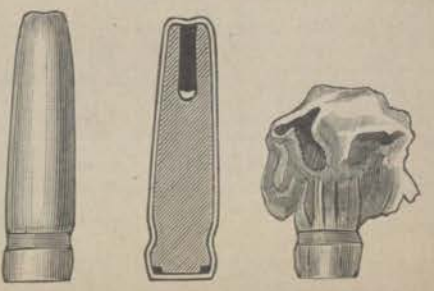


FIG. 8. HOLLOW-POINTED BULLETS

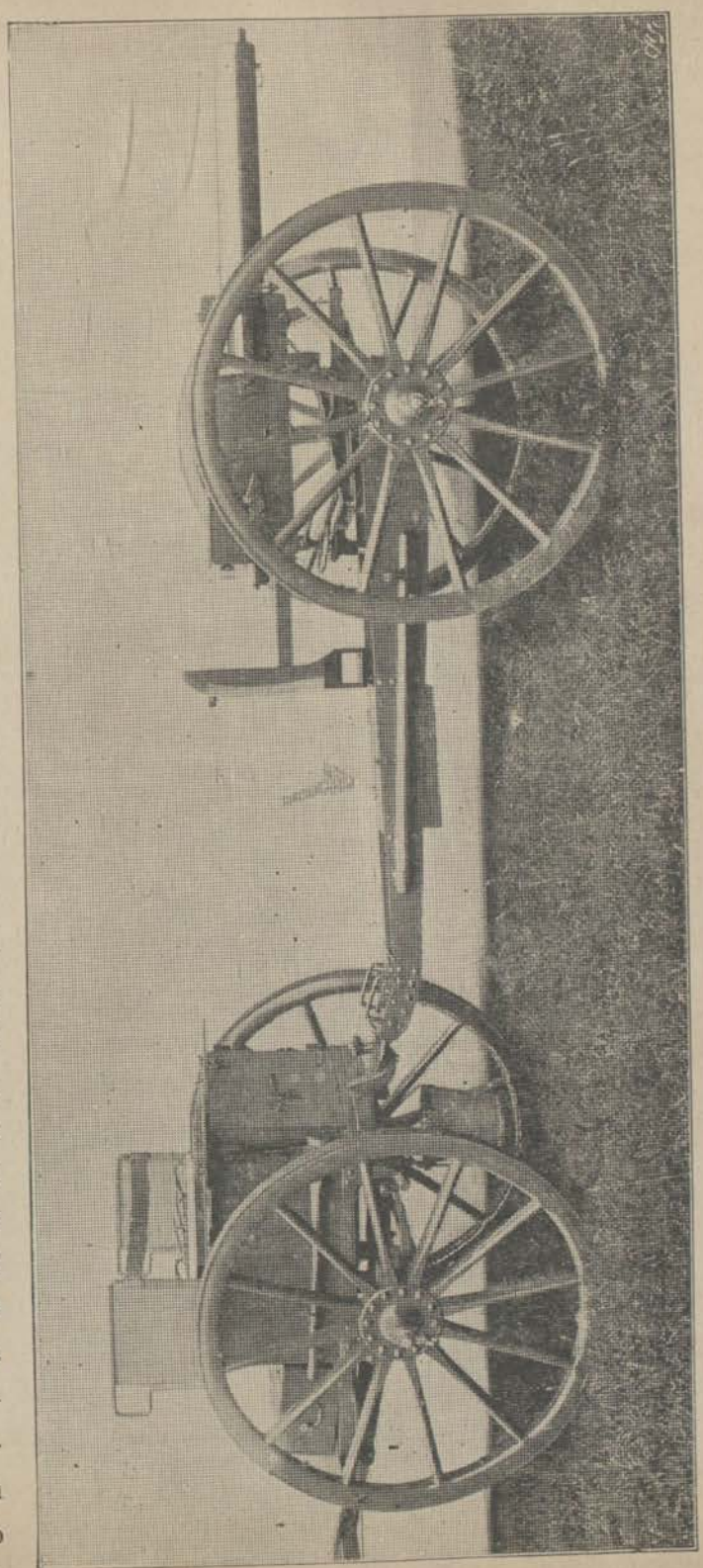
Yorkshires supported by the other half battalion of Highlanders, while the left flank was composed of the half battalion of North Lancashires, who had orders to cross the river and turn the Boer right.

It was eight o'clock. Under cover of the artillery the Guards advanced down the scarcely perceptible slope that led to the Riet. Among the ranks of the Brigade there was no presentiment of coming danger, though the battalions marched in extended order, and every preparation had been made for a possible fight. The skirmish on their outer flank had died away, silence reigned along the veldt, and the scattered groups of the retreating enemy seemed to have abandoned the combat. The steady rhythm of the advance was uninterrupted, and the leading companies had got within 1,000 yards of the wished-for river, when from the silent line of trees and bush there issued a horrid and appalling fire that swept like a blast over the thin streaks of moving men, and tore the plain throughout of a zone of a mile in breadth.

THE POMPOM SHELL
(*Actual Size*)

Like one man the Guardsmen dropped upon their faces and returned the fire as best they could. Though the first line was thinned and the whole had suffered from the sudden burst of the fusilade, no man hesitated, and the challenge was accepted grimly and without faltering. Here there was no chance, as at Belmont, of rushing the position, for the line of trenches was half a mile away, and the space between was a bare track of almost waveless plain, offering no shelter except the ant-hills and the ten-inch scrub. Not a Boer was to be seen, not even the puff of the rifles was visible, yet the air was throbbing with the crack of musketry and torn by the screaming of bullets. To the unceasing rattle of the Mauser was added a furious cannonade, the Vickers-Maxim for the first time vomiting its rapid succession of shells upon the crouching lines, and

the deeper roar of the field-guns and heavier ordnance crowning the din with their measured and solemn note. And not only against the Guards. From flank to flank of the Boer position, like the quick ignition of a hidden train, ran a stream of fire, and from the willow-beds of the Riet to the dams west of the railway bridge came a stinging hail of missiles. Like their comrades, the 9th Brigade came under the sweep of the pitiless storm, but they were further back than Colvile's troops, and in the first stage of the fight suffered less. While the Guards lay patiently enduring in front of the trenches that nothing living could approach, the left wing made what progress they could, taking advantage of every undulation in the plain and doing their best to master by their rifles alone the fierce and increasing fire of their opponents.



THE POMPOM

Although the whole front of Colvile's Brigade lost sharply under the first outburst of Boer fire, it was the Scots Guards who suffered most, partly because they were more exposed to the flanking fire from the trenches on the western bank of the Riet. Against them, too, the dreaded Pompom bent its aim, shattering the shield of their maxim, killing and wounding the detachment, and rendering the gun useless. The battalion fell back on its nearest cover, the old reservoir buildings some hundreds of yards in its right rear. Two companies were lodged in these, the rest took what shelter they could find, some pushing up the willow-beds on the right until they were met by a severe enfilading fire and brought to a standstill. The Grenadiers and the 2nd Coldstreams, whose Colonel, Stopford, was killed, lay under the protection of a slight ridge about 900 yards from the Boer trenches, and there remained throughout the day, unwilling, if not unable, to retreat, still more unable to advance. Captain Heneage, who tried to do so, immediately lost four sergeants and had to abandon the attempt.

The Brigade's resources were not yet exhausted. Soon after the advance of the Scots Guards became impossible Colonel Codrington was ordered to move up on their right, apparently in order to outflank Cronje by forcing the passage of the Riet. The attempt was gallantly made, Codrington and Captain Fielding, with twenty-four men, actually passing the stream; but they were unsupported, and were forced to re-cross under a furious hail of bullets, several of the men being nearly drowned, and only saved by a kind of rope formed of the putties of their comrades. The whole got safely back, but it was seen that the venture was too desperate, and no further effort in this quarter was made.

For the rest of the day the long lines of Guardsmen clung tenaciously to the ground they occupied, exhausted, though undaunted, by as trying conditions as ever soldier had to face. They were exposed to a heat of 110°, lying on the breeches of their rifles to keep them cool enough to handle, tortured by thirst and wounds, for neither stretcher-bearers nor water-carts could penetrate the leaden tempest which swept a few feet over their prostrate forms. To move was to be shot at, to show a hand or a head was to draw a volley from

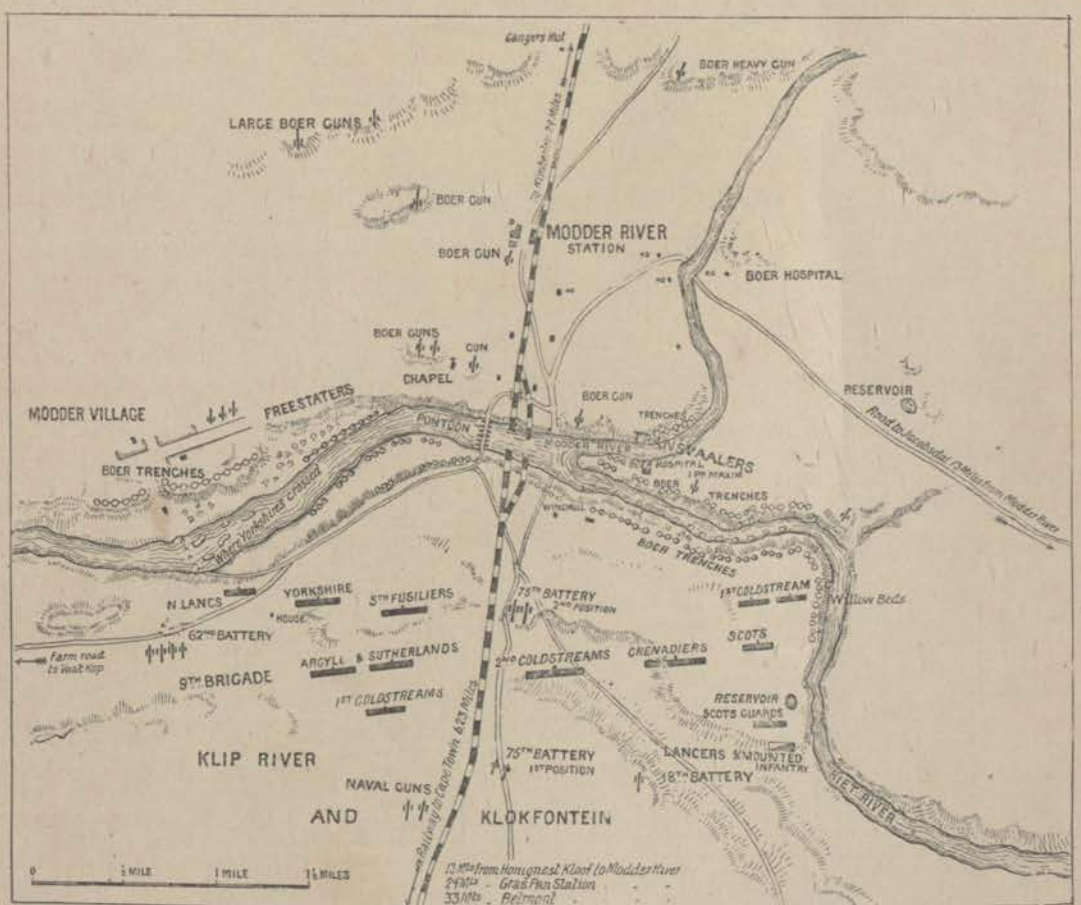
THE BATTLE OF THE MODDER RIVER—VIEW OF THE ENGAGEMENT AS SEEN BY THE GRENADIERS

the watchful enemy who fired irrespectively upon ambulances and stretcher-bearers, four of whom were shot dead while performing their duty. Now and again the fire slackened, only to commence again as soon as an object presented itself. Worse than the Mauser bullets were the little 1-lb. shells of the Pompom, which sorely tried the nerves of the men. They came in batches of five or six, fired within the space of a second, now dropping in a curve along the front of the target, now falling one in front of the other as the gun was elevated. One officer got in the line of one of these discharges, four shells striking a few yards in his front, the last two just behind him. Unlike the heavier shells, they seem to have exploded on the surface of the ground instead of sinking into the sand. One man had both his thighs blown off by one of these miniature bombs, though, as a rule, like other varieties of shell, their bark was worse than their bite.

Gradually the long day wore away, many of the Guards now fast asleep upon the burning veldt, worn out with heat and fatigue. Some were shot dead as they slumbered. Neither they nor the enemy showed any inclination to make a forward move. Far away to the right a few Boers were hovering, drawing an effective fire from one of our Maxims. To the left rear the field batteries were raining shrapnel upon the belt of vegetation along the river and the tiers of trenches behind. To the right rear stood Methuen's small mounted force for the most part out of action. It was clear that if we were to cross the Modder that day the move would have to come from the other wing.

But while Pole-Carew slowly and with great difficulty developed his infantry attack upon the Boer right, the British artillery was desperately engaged in the centre. After aiding the cavalry in their brief engagement of the morning the two batteries had come forward in rear of the right attack, and then, attracted as it would seem, by the heavy gun fire from behind Modder village, had galloped up to the close range of 2,200 yards, taking up a position to the right of the railway. It was about 10 a.m. when they reached this point, but an hour later they were within 1,200 yards of the river, the movement having been carried out under cover of four naval twelve-pounders stationed some 3,000 yards farther back. It was a bold effort, for

they were now within rifle range, and the opposing guns were of far heavier calibre. The guns were hard pressed to hold their ground, and the losses, both amongst men and horses, were considerable. At 11.30 the 75th had to fall back to refit. Eleven men and three officers were wounded, and the ammunition was all but exhausted. Twenty-five horses were killed in getting the guns off, and the officers chargers had to be used. Major Lindsay and Captain Farrell, both



THE BATTLE OF MODDER RIVER, NOVEMBER 28, 1899

wounded, had to walk back after their retiring battery. One driver, wounded in the lungs, insisted on helping to get his gun away. It was one of the many cases of pluck and resolution with which the battle-field was teeming.

The unflagging fire of the artillery was our salvation. Throughout the worst hours of the fight the sustaining thunder of the guns cheered the drooping spirits of the infantry, and although sorely tried the 18th

and 75th strove successfully to neutralise the superior range and heavier metal of the opposing cannon by the rapidity and accuracy with which they served their own. On them weighed the grave responsibility that rests with the guns of the assailant, the need of quelling as well as checking, of concentrating as well as diffusing, of bearing the stress of the opposing fire as well as crushing a way for the attack of their own infantry. For the whole of the day the two batteries remained in action, the 75th alone firing over 1,100 shells, pouring their shot now upon the village, now along the trenches, now upon the guns on the slopes behind. Next day the ruins of the hotels, the torn trenches, and the bullet-spattered shield of the Pompom bore eloquent testimony to the thoroughness of their work. Soon after midday they received a worthy coadjutor. The 62nd Field Battery, which had only arrived at Belmont twenty-eight hours before, had made a forced march through the tremendous heat and arrived in time to support the efforts of the 9th Brigade.

Pole-Carew's men had, says Lord Methuen, the same hard task before them that faced the Guards Brigade. Here, too, the attacking force was met by a heavy frontal fire, while on the extreme left an outcrop of rocks and small kopjes, on the south bank of the river, was strongly held and checked the advance of the North Lancashires. All the morning seems to have been spent in slow but unbroken progress, and by midday the front of the 9th Brigade must have been on a level with that of the Guards. By that hour neither wing appears to have made better progress than the other, but on the left there was no encircling Riet to hem the outflanking movement, and the fire of our artillery had in some degree shaken the steadfastness of the Free State levies. This latter fact was, of course, unknown till afterwards, but it must be remembered as a most important element in the following phases of the fight.

It was about this time that Lord Methuen, seeing that the right attack was definitely stopped, began to move troops to the support of Carew. A mixed body of infantry, consisting of the Highland Regiment, the Northumberlands, and a few Coldstreams, all in fact who could safely be spared from the hardly-tried right, was sent westwards over the line,

and the artillery turned their fire upon the Boer right. The change was not accomplished without heavy loss, the Argyll and Sutherlands suffering

GENERAL POLE-CAREW [ON THE RIGHT] IN HIS TENT ON THE MODDER

nearly one hundred casualties as they crossed the railway in too close formation. In fact, on the left as well as the right, persistence seemed hopeless, and it was only the slightly more favourable conditions and the

indomitable spirit of the troops which enabled them finally to triumph. By 2 p.m. the Boer leaders appear to have considered the weight of the English attack broken. Their posts on the southern bank were firmly held, and no progress could be made till these were taken.

At this moment the position on the left was briefly as follows. The Lancashires, who had gone into action only 285 strong, were holding a small kopje, and unable to advance across the open ground which lay between them and the river. The Yorkshires, 600 yards to the east, were lying opposite a strongly-held farmhouse and kraal, which forbade access to the shallow waters of the lagoon and the artificial dam which crossed the stream below it. The 62nd Battery had just come on the field, and was hurling shrapnel upon all the salient points of the defence, once, it is said, firing on their own infantry by mistake.

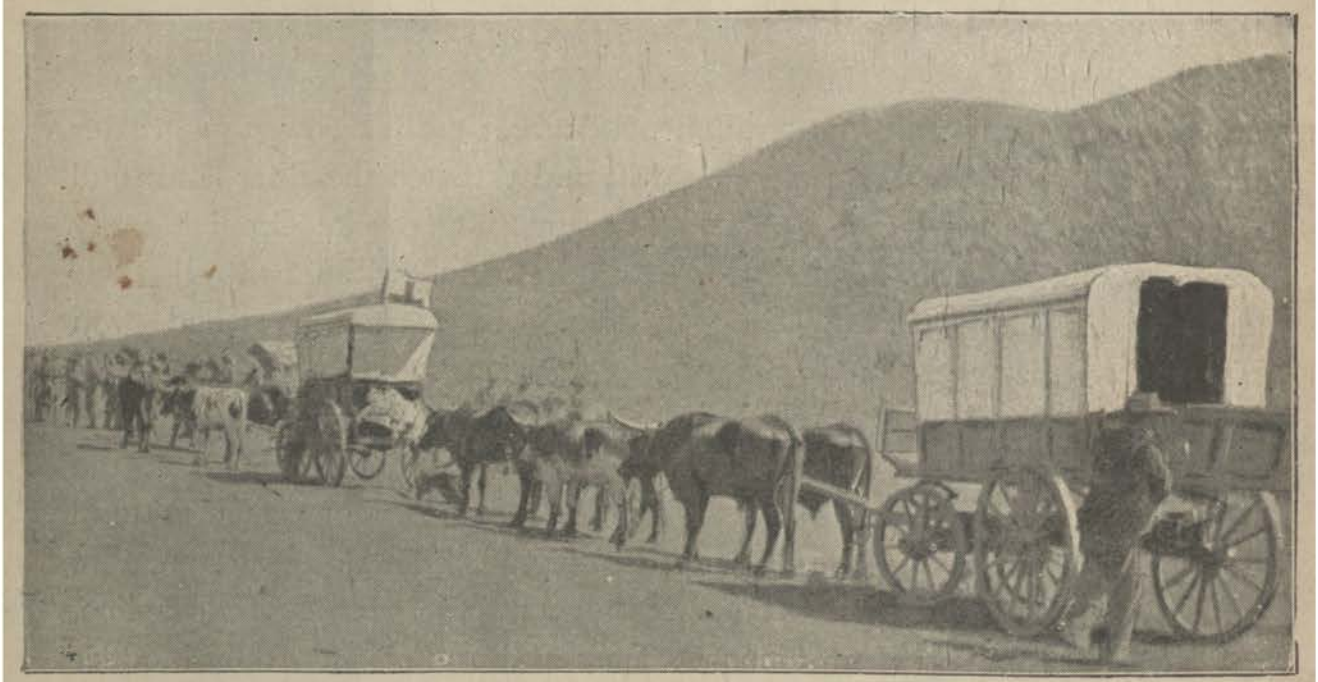
But this episode was fortunately short, and the arrival of the guns marked the turn of the tide. The Free Staters on the kopjes to the left of the Lancashires were becoming nervous and exhausted. They fled at the approach of the battery and recrossed the stream. At the same moment a combined rush of Yorkshires, Northumberlands, and Highlanders under Colonel Barter, cleared the farmhouse opposite the drift. Without pausing, the pursuers followed them across the dam, man after man working his way under a furious fire along the iron paddles of the weir, and clinging to the iron bar which formed its framework. It was a splendid and successful feat of daring. In a short time 400 men had passed the 300 yards which separated them from the northern bank; the Lancashires followed suit, and the Boer right was at last turned. It was past three o'clock when Pole-Carew, who had directed the movement, made good his footing upon the farther shore and began to press inward upon the enemy's centre.

The success of the 9th Brigade had decided the day, but the combat still raged with unabated ferocity. Until night the enemy held firm opposite the Guards, and frustrated all the efforts of our victorious left to gain his line of retreat. Three-quarters of a mile did Carew's stubborn infantry gain along the river bank, but they were again forced back by the sheer weight of the opposing fire. Nightfall found them almost opposite the dam, clinging desperately to their hardly won position.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the fire died away, and our troops utterly incapable of further effort, sank down to snatch a few hours' rest. The depression that inevitably follows so tremendous a strain reigned throughout the ranks. Food there was practically none, and except for those who could reach the river, even water was difficult to procure. Some of the Guardsmen ran down to the banks of the Riet and quenched their maddening thirst under a sharp spatter of bullets. Few knew as yet whether the enemy would retreat. There was talk of rushing the Boer entrenchments with the bayonet, though few had sufficient energy for the task. Fortunately, General Colvile, who had taken over the command at 5.30 p.m., after Lord Methuen had received a flesh wound in the thigh, wisely decided to rest the troops, and, if the enemy were in position at daybreak, to throw the greater part of the force over Pole-Carew's drift and threaten the Boer flank and rear. But it was not necessary. When morning broke Cronje's army had disappeared. They had passed the stream, withdrawn all their guns, and fallen back upon Spytfontein. Lord Methuen had won his third victory within six days.

No doubt Cronje acted wisely. The Free Staters had been very badly shaken by our shells, and had begun to waver about the time that Carew made his attack. It requires more than natural courage to withstand the nerve-sickening effect that shrapnel-fire produces upon raw troops. It needs the controlling force of discipline, and this was not present amongst Steyn's burghers at the Modder River. They got out of control and yielded to the persistent vigour of the 9th Brigade. Their losses had not been heavy, but the wounded were mostly hit by shells, and the injuries were ghastly. They believed that we were using Lyddite, and their wills, unsustained by capable leaders, and shaken by the dread of unknown dangers and present horrors, broke down under the strain. It was late in the day when the Boer General learnt the failure of his allies, and hurrying from the other extremity of the field, endeavoured to restore the fight, or failing this, to ensure his own retreat. To him must be attributed the vigorous resistance that the 9th Brigade experienced, and the swiftness and secrecy with which the retirement was effected.

Critics have not spared Lord Methuen's tactics, nor does it appear to judge from the numerous accounts and letters that they have been in error on the main issue. It seems that two different allegations, or perhaps it would be better to say questions, may be urged as to the conduct of the operations after the arrival of the column at Honey-nest Kloof. Firstly, how was it that no one knew of Cronje's presence on the Modder, or at any rate of his preparation for its defence on the afternoon of the 27th? The enemy was only half a day's march away, and yet not a soul was aware of it. The advantages of the



CRONJE'S AMBULANCE WAGGONS RETURNING TO TAKE AWAY THE WOUNDED AFTER THE FIGHT ON THE MODDER

river as a defensive position appear to have escaped the staff, and no attempt was made to cross or to ascertain the condition of the river-bed, though either of these precautions would have disclosed to some extent the plans of the enemy. No doubt here, as elsewhere, Lord Methuen was severely handicapped by weakness in cavalry, but it is difficult to believe that more might not have been done. When an army intends to cross a river eight miles away, it is hardly too much to ask the cavalry to seize the passages or to reconnoitre them as thoroughly as the enemy will permit.

Secondly, why was no further reconnaissance made before the infantry advanced to the attack? Once again the position was attacked first and located afterwards. In his despatch the General says that he resolved "to keep his two brigades in touch, widely extended, and trust to their gaining the opposite bank, as was done." "Any other course," he adds, "must be attended with great risk when opposite 8,000 horsemen with a river to assist them." There is a vagueness about the phraseology which is characteristic of Lord Methuen's information and

AFTER THE BATTLE OF MODDER RIVER. CAVALRY WATERING THEIR HORSES

plans. To push troops in parallel order against unknown obstacles and trust to their overcoming them shows a praiseworthy confidence in one's men, but can scarcely be called generalship. Nor is an advance by the whole of one's infantry exactly the same thing as a reconnaissance. As far as we are aware there was no need of hurry. If the cavalry was not available—and we know that it was occupied upon the extreme right at the moment when the infantry advance was ordered—it would surely have been well to have waited till it was at liberty, or to

have relieved it with part of the Guards, as was done later in the day, or to have made a liberal use of infantry patrols. The fact that Lord Methuen advanced his brigades in extended order shows, at any rate, that he contemplated the possibility of the enemy being present. This being so, a careful examination of the river banks before committing the whole force to what turned out to be a frontal attack would not have savoured of overcaution. It may with all deference be submitted that if modern conditions really render adequate reconnaissance impossible, all offensive action—*i.e.*, action which seeks the enemy with the object of assailing him—stands condemned. In the present instance the result was that the infantry had to find the enemy's flanks, the only vulnerable points, for themselves, the very same task that cost the Prussian Guards 8,000 men at St. Privat. In the latter case, however, the French right was supposed to have been located by the cavalry; at the Modder the business was left to the infantry alone.

The desperate nature of the fight arose out of this failure to acquire accurate information. Wonderfully as the Boers concealed themselves, admirably as their tree-screened trenches were constructed, great as was their self-restraint until the British were thoroughly exposed to their fire, the General or his subordinates can hardly avoid censure for thus falling into the carefully prepared snare. Fortunately for us, the Boer inadaptability to offensive warfare was never more clearly shown than at the Modder. Had the enemy possessed the initiative of regular troops, the Guards might have suffered a terrible disaster. Several of the prisoners realised this and blamed Cronje for his want of dash.

The battle is interesting as the first fight that seemed fairly to meet the prognostications of theorists. It was what many scientific soldiers have predicted that a duel of modern firearms would be. The increased strength of the defence, the intensity of magazine fire, was fully demonstrated. The invisibility of the enemy, the result of cover, distance, and smokeless powder, and the duration of the combat were other noticeable factors which had long been calculated on. Far more astonishing were the small losses which the British column suffered; 485 is not a heavy total when it is remembered that for thirteen hours about 6,500 men were lying exposed upon an absolutely

A CAPTIVE BALLOON IN THE ENGLISH CAMP

open plain, under a fire that swept it effectively throughout a zone of a mile and a half in depth. The fact that great-coats were not carried by the troops may partially account for the extraordinary disproportionate number of hits to misses, for great-coats are a good mark to fire at when men are extended prone upon their faces at a considerable distance. But when all allowances are made, 7½ is a remarkably low percentage, all the more so that the fire was well controlled and, for the most part, turned upon some definite target. It is pretty clear that the risk from long-range fire, when men are lying down, is not as great as it seems. But the thick hail of shot makes movements most dangerous if not impossible, prolongs the contest, and prevents decisive results. Henceforth the strength of troops will depend more than ever upon their power of patient endurance, a quality so splendidly illustrated by our soldiers at the Modder. When Lord Methuen described the fight as one of the hardest and most trying in the history of the British army he did not exaggerate. The terrors of battle will henceforth be measured rather by their duration and by the degree of nervous tension they involve than by the actual losses. The weaker side will yield, as it yielded at the Modder, rather to the fear of death than to death itself, and the fruits of victory will be reaped less and less upon the field and more and more in the pursuit. Masses of prisoners will be the true standard by which success will be judged, more than in the days of Rivoli and Wagram, more even than in those of Sedan. But war will remain for all that the highest and most awful form of human conflict and the increasing importance of the moral as compared with the physical will rather heighten than eliminate the terrors of its impassioned drama.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF MAGERSFONTEIN

AFTER THE BATTLE ON THE MODDER—EXHAUSTION AND DISORGANISATION IN METHUEN'S FORCE—HIS HALT JUSTIFIED—FIGHT AT ENSLIN—ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS AT THE MODDER—METHUEN'S INFORMATION AS TO THE BOER POSITION—DESCRIPTION OF THIS—ALTERNATIVES OPEN TO HIM—HE RESOLVES TO ATTACK THE ENEMY'S CENTRE AT MAGERSFONTEIN—BOMBARDMENT ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON—PROBABLE EFFECTS—BIVOUAC OF HIGHLANDERS AND GUARDS—WAUCHOPE'S ORDERS AND INTENTIONS—MARCH OF HIGHLANDERS—THEY APPROACH THE KOPJES—THE FIRST FIRE—THE DEATH OF WAUCHOPE—RALLY OF THE BRIGADE—ARRIVAL OF ARTILLERY—12TH LANCERS AND COLDSTREAMS—DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO REACH TRENCHES—ATTACK ON BRITISH RIGHT—CHECKED BY GUARDS AND YORKSHIRES—ADVANCE OF GORDONS—RETIREMENT OF HIGHLAND BRIGADE—SECOND RALLY—SPLENDID BEHAVIOUR OF ARTILLERY—BOER GUNS OPEN—HIGHLAND BRIGADE RETREATS—NIGHTFALL—GUARDS HOLD POSITION—SITUATION IN THE MORNING—METHUEN RESOLVES TO WITHDRAW—ORDERLY RETREAT—END OF THE KIMBERLEY RELIEF COLUMN—GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

FIRMLY established on the Modder and the Riet—the last streams that interposed between the British column and Kimberley—Lord Methuen halted his weary troops and made good the disorganisation which inevitably followed upon the exertions of the preceding days. Some have urged that without awaiting reinforcements he should have pushed on and attacked Cronje in his last stronghold at Spytfontein before he should have recovered from his defeat. Few soldiers would have advocated such a policy. It is difficult for those who have had no experience of war to realise the narrow limits of human endurance or the uncontrollable confusion which accompanies hard marching and fighting. The small force of cavalry had been severely overstrained, the infantry utterly exhausted, the supplies were inadequate, the losses in all ranks heavy. Colonel Northcott—one of the Deputy-Assistant-Adjutant-Generals—had been killed, Lord Methuen himself was wounded, Major-General Pole-Carew, who had taken the place of Featherstonhaugh, had only reached his brigade on the morning of the Modder fight, and two colonels of the Guards had fallen—one killed, the other wounded. Every battalion had suffered,

although the casualty lists were not unreasonably heavy, forty-one officers is a very appreciable deficit on eight and a half battalions; three of these—the Grenadiers, Yorkshires, and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders—had lost over 100 rank and file, the Grenadiers coming first with 165 killed and wounded; two—the Scots Guards and the Northumberland Fusiliers—had lost over ninety men, the 2nd Coldstreams over seventy; the Naval Brigade had been destroyed as a body of infantry at Graspan. Altogether Lord Methuen had lost some fifty officers and 900 men in a week. In front of him was an enemy which he rated a fortnight later at 16,000 men, entrenched in immensely strong positions. To attack such a force, even though shaken by three defeats, with little more than a third of its numbers would have been madness. Judged in the light of after events his determination to await reinforcements was more than justified.

For the next twelve days, therefore, the British rested on the Modder. A pontoon and a railway bridge were thrown over the stream above and below the bridge broken by the Boers, and supplies were hurried up. Nothing of importance occurred till December 7th, when a force of Boers, estimated at a thousand strong with two Krupp guns, attacked the temporary fort at Enslin, which was held by 200 of the Northamptons, and tore up the railway north of Graspan. From dawn to midday the enemy shelled the position, but the rifle fire always kept them at a distance, and they were finally driven off by the 62nd Battery, which came in hot haste from the Modder. Our losses were eleven wounded, and five Boers were killed by the artillery fire. They retreated to Jacobsdal, and for some weeks gave no further trouble. The arrival of the first Australian and Canadian contingents at De Aar and Belmont further strengthened our line of communications, and released the 1st Gordons, who were sent up with the Highland Brigade to join Lord Methuen. By December 9th he had been strengthened by five Scotch battalions, a Howitzer Battery (65th), "G" Battery of the Horse Artillery, a naval 4·7 inch gun, and the 12th Lancers. His infantry now numbered about 10,000 men; he had two cavalry regiments, besides Rimington's Guides, and thirty-one guns. He resolved to force his way to Kimberley without delay.

GENERAL PIET CRONJE

Although the General had been now eleven days on the Modder he had no exact knowledge of the Boer positions five to ten miles to the north, east, north, and north-west. The reconnaissance work had been extremely difficult, owing to the large amount of wire between the Riet and Modder, and to the entrenchments north of the latter stream. All that was certain was that Cronje had strongly fortified the Spytfontein kopjes stretching west and east of the railway, as well as a low ridge called by Lord Methuen "an underfeature," which prolonged the south-eastern end of the main heights to the river bank. This underfeature was five miles long, and was thickly covered by vaal bushes—shrubs from five to ten feet high with a dense green foliage. At its north-western extremity it abutted against the steep kopjes of Magersfontein, about three miles east of the railway and nearly the same distance from Scholtz Kop, where Cronje's main position was supposed to be. The Magersfontein hill was only about 150 feet high, for the most bare of anything but boulders. Between it and Scholtz Kop the ridge sank, so that these two points were the keys of the whole position.

Lord Methuen, no doubt rightly, judged that a frontal attack on the central heights of Spytfontein would fail. It remained to find a way round. He does not seem to have thought a movement down the Modder practicable, partly, no doubt, for the same reason that he discarded a march up-stream—viz., that he would thus have exposed his communications; though not so directly as he would if he had moved on Jacobsdal with the threatening spur of Magersfontein on his flank. Probably, too, the country was more broken to the west of the railway, and the Boer positions there stronger. At any rate, he considered that he had only three alternatives open: firstly, to go round by Jacobsdal; secondly, to force the underfeature and so turn the northern ridge; thirdly, to seize the Magersfontein hill itself, and thence make a final flanking attack upon Scholtz Kop. The first he rejected owing to insufficiency of transport and the probability of finding "16,000" men ready to dispute the passage of the river; the second as certain to entail heavy loss and as likely to expose the guns to an attack from the northward. He chose the third.

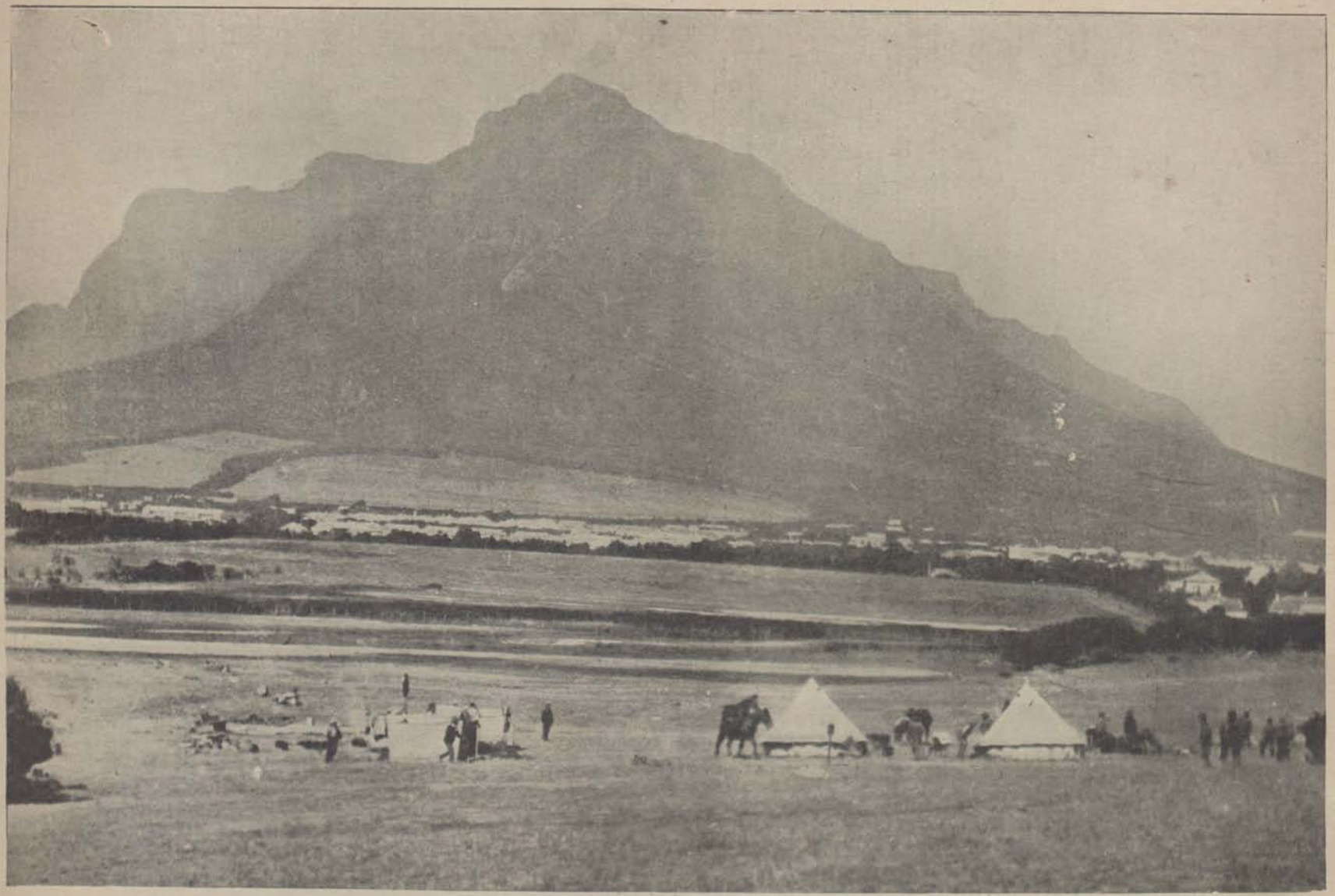
The decision was one of great daring. If successful it would ensure every advantage that the forcing of an enemy's centre entails. The Boers on the underfeature would be cut from those at Scholtz Kop and forced to retreat, probably with heavy loss, the big laagers along the Modder could be seized, and the rear of the great fortifications above the railway threatened. At the same time the English communications would be safe. Lord Methuen's conception was bold

THE OFFICERS OF THE BLACK WATCH

and soldier-like. The two essential conditions of success were accuracy of information and secrecy in execution.

On Saturday, December 9th, the naval gun fired sixteen experimental rounds—ten with lyddite, which was now used for the first time in the campaign. The shells struck with great precision, throwing up huge clouds of greenish vapour and brown dust, and impressing every one with their efficacy. Next day the Gordons arrived, and the General decided to attack on the morrow.

Attaching an erroneous value to the effects of the shell fire during

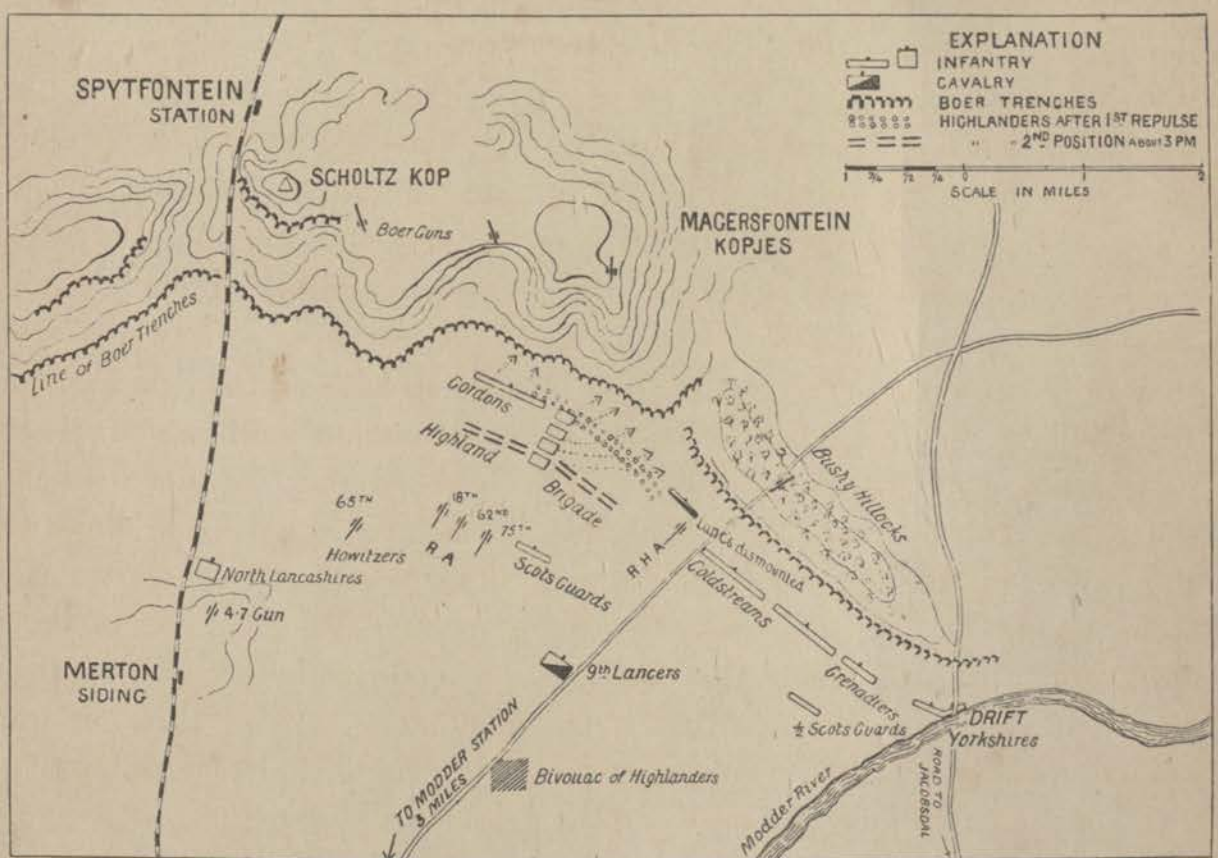


MAGERSFONTEIN

the previous engagements, the British commander ordered a bombardment with every available gun to begin about half-past four on Sunday afternoon and to last till dark. At 2 p.m. the troops left the camp, the 9th Lancers leading with a section of "G" Battery and being followed by the Highland Brigade and the whole of the artillery, including the great naval gun, which was drawn by twenty yoke of oxen on the left of the advance. With much pomp and circumstance the batteries moved on, and, covered by the infantry, came into action at the prescribed time—the 4·7 near the railway, at a range of from 6,000 to 8,000 yards, the howitzers at 4,000, the lighter guns at 2,800. The whole of their fire was concentrated on the Magersfontein ridge, sweeping the entire crest with missiles and shrouding the face with smoke. Nothing could have lived upon those gaunt hills, for the guns were served with great accuracy, and the effect of the lyddite striking upon the ironstone rocks was appalling. The enemy afterwards said that they suffered more heavily from the bombardment than during the battle of the following day. As we have no certain estimate of these losses, the comparison gives us no clue. No doubt occasional shells did great damage, but throughout the afternoon the enemy—thanks to the heavy rain, the great distance, and their powers of concealment—were practically invisible, and would not disclose the positions of their own guns by attempting to reply. It is quite possible that during the bombardment they evacuated their trenches. At 6.45 p.m. our fire ceased, and the artillery fell back; the Highlanders bivouacked about two and a half miles from the Magersfontein hill, eating their cold rations in the drizzling rain. The Guards, who had struck their camp in full daylight, crossed the river after dark by a ford unmarked on the map, many of the men getting wet through during the passage. They did not reach their halting place on the right rear of the Highland Brigade until ten o'clock. The 9th Brigade, excepting a detachment with the naval gun, remained in camp.

At 12.30 the Highlanders left their dreary and comfortless bivouac and formed in mass of quarter-columns, one battalion behind the other, an order rendered necessary by the darkness of the night and the encumbered ground that had to be crossed. It was afterwards remarked

that a line of battalions in double company columns had been successfully used for a night march at the Orange River. To have adopted this order would of course have greatly reduced the depth of the brigade and proportionately increased its frontage. Without pretending to decide between the peculiar merits of these two formations, it may safely be said that Wauchope's preliminary arrangement was excellently suited to the purpose for which it was intended,

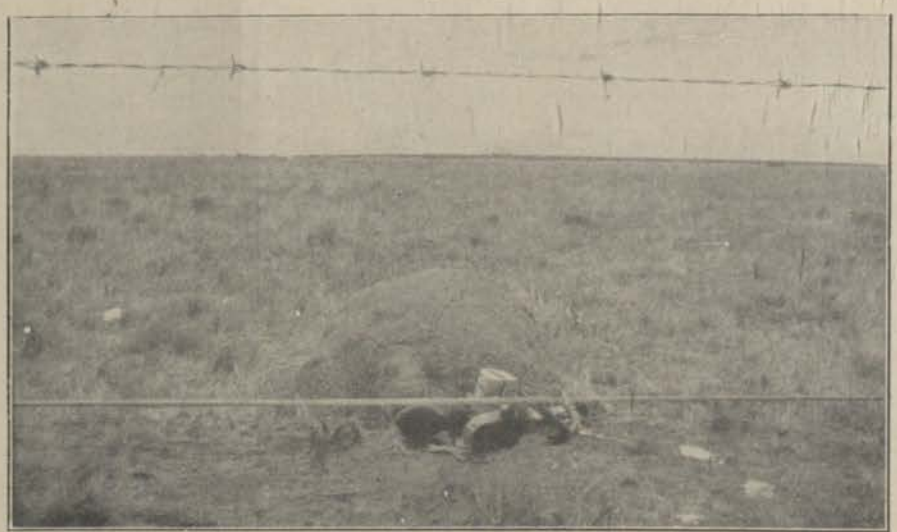


THE BATTLE OF MAGERSFONTEIN, DECEMBER 10 AND 11, 1899

namely, that of moving over 3,000 men through pitch darkness and broken ground upon a single point. That point was the south-eastern extremity of the Magersfontein hill. The gallant and experienced leader of the Highland Brigade had carefully explained his intentions to his battalion commanders. His task being the seizure of the Magersfontein kopjes he had determined to march on the south-western spur of the height, afterwards extending the Black Watch to the east, or right of the ridge where he understood that the Boers were posted under shelter.

The Seaforths on the left of the Black Watch were to assault the south-eastern spur and the Argyll and Sutherland to advance to the left of the Seaforths. The fourth battalion, the Highland Light Infantry, was to be in reserve. The attack was to take place in three lines, two companies in front, two in support, four in reserve. All were to move in extended order, five paces between each man. The operation was intended to be a surprise and the position to be rushed at dawn.

The distance, about two and a half miles, could in the daytime have easily have been traversed in an hour. Knowing, however, the



BOER WIRE FENCE 500 YARDS FROM THE BOER TRENCHES AT MAGERSFONTEIN

difficulties of a night march Lord Methuen allowed three hours, the hour of dawn being 3.25 a.m. Major Benson, R.A., acted as guide, having personally explored the ground beforehand. With a compass in each hand the Major started at the head of the column, just as the young moon disappeared in a halo of rainy mist.

Meanwhile Cronje and Albrecht, whose attention had been drawn to the Magersfontein ridge by the bombardment of the afternoon, had prepared an elaborate scheme of defence, the details of which, probably completed days before, marked something of a change in the Boer tactics. On and behind the hill crests were placed the guns hidden by specially planted thornbushes. On the

slopes in front were small parties of men armed with Martini rifle and black powder. They were ordered to fire volleys so as to draw towards themselves the fire of our artillery. Lower down and conspicuously placed ran a long field work which was absolutely empty of men and was meant purely as a further means of distracting the assailants. It was on the plain, two hundred yards from the base

MAJOR-GENERAL ANDREW G. WAUCHOPE, C.B., C.M.G.

of the hill that the real line of defence lay, consisting of deeply-sunk trenches. These were filled with men armed with the smokeless Mauser. No one in the Highland Brigade knew of their extent or even of their existence. They appear to have run for miles following the contour of the hills and joining on the one side the defences of Scholtz Kop, and on the other those of the underfeature between Magersfontein, and the Modder. By digging these at the foot of the

kopjes the Boers gained three advantages. In the first place, they went unnoticed by our artillerymen who fired at the ridges. In the second, they were invisible to approaching infantry. In the third, they gave the assailants no chance of shelter among the steep bouldered sides of the kopjes during the final charge. By occupying the crests the Boers disclosed their position; by entrenching in the plains they concealed it.

All unconscious of the danger the Highlanders plodded on, kept together partly by ropes, partly by constant halts. A thunderstorm had come on and the compass bearings were frequently upset by the lightning. The pace of the march was extremely slow, and it was nearly four o'clock when the steep bluff of the kopje was sighted, looming through the darkness. Then Major Benson, who had led the column with great accuracy, turned to Wauchope and asked him if he did not think it time to deploy. A thick strip of bush, however, threw the leading battalion, the Black Watch, into confusion, and by the time that was past and the Seaforths, who were following and had gone round the bush on the right, had returned to their place behind the Black Watch, the brigade had advanced 200 yards. The Brigadier, seeing no enemy to his right, ordered the Black Watch to extend opposite the hill, the Seaforth to the left and the Argyll and Sutherlands to the right. The movement had barely commenced, the leading companies had not extended and the men were still marching at the easy when a devastating volley burst from the hidden trenches to the front and right.

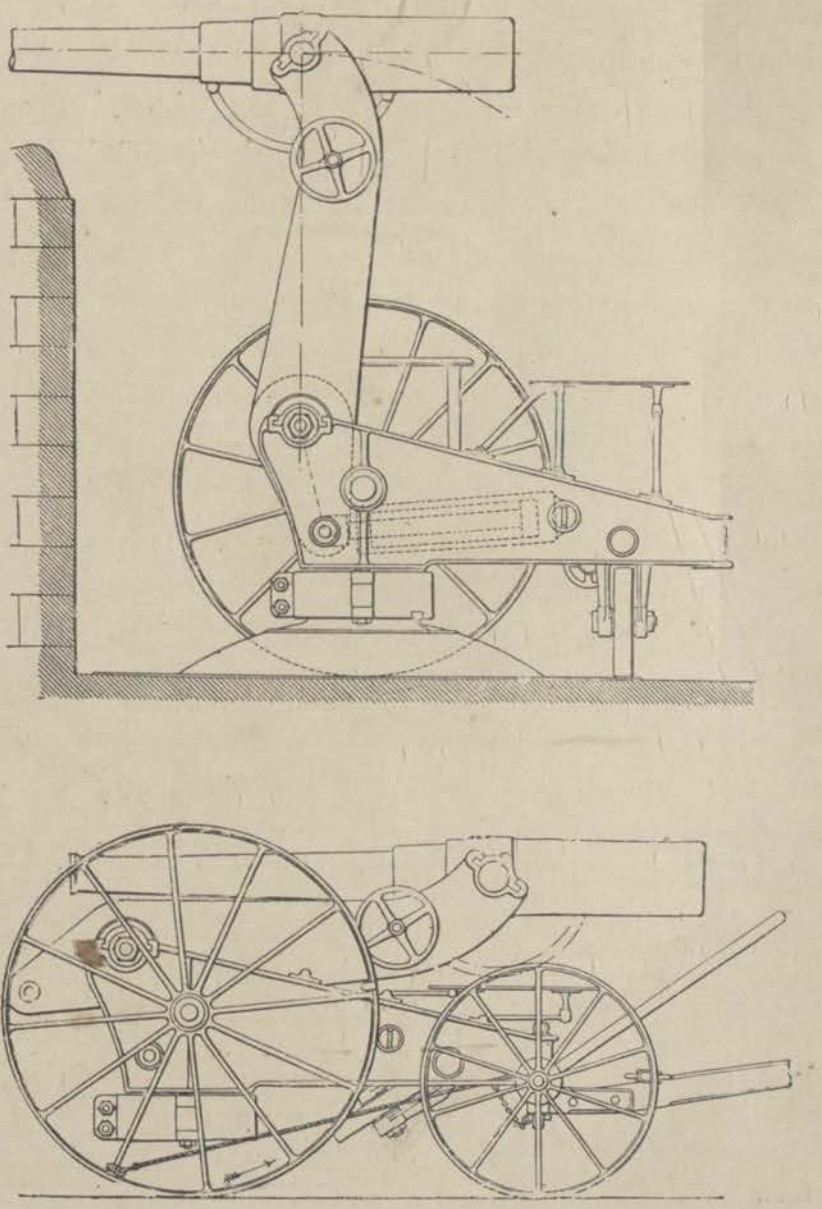
Before that dreadful storm half the front of the column went down, many of the men riddled with wounds. Some say that Wauchope led the first companies of his own battalion, the Black Watch, against the trenches; others that he fell mortally hit at the first fire. Certain it is that he died during the first moments of the action, before the crash of musketry which ruined his brigade ceased. As suddenly as it had begun the tempest ended. The Boers paused to recharge their magazines, there was a momentary silence, and the dim veldt, but a moment before ablaze with fire, again faded into blackness. Magersfontein had been fought and won.

THE HIGHLAND BRIGADE AT MAGERSFONTEIN

For a moment the Brigade wavered before the blast. When the Mausers opened, the leading ranks of the Black Watch cheered and prepared to charge. Then, as the leading companies sank in rows beneath the bullets, the survivors hesitated, and rushed back amongst the Seaforths, knocking some of them over in the panic. Severely punished, the latter still remained under control. At Colonel Hughes-Halkett's command they lay down, and their steady demeanour stopped the fast-spreading nervousness. The men of the 42nd halted and lay down with them, and the two battalions managed in some measure to extend, two companies of the Seaforths moving out to the right, and the rest continuing in their original position. The Argyll and Sutherlands and the Highland Light Infantry also prolonged the line eastward, in the hope of checking the flanking fire.

These movements were slowly and brokenly executed, under a constant stream of bullets which caused heavy loss. Still more costly were the frantic efforts that the hitherto intact parts of the brigade made to retrieve the day. Twice in the first half-hour did the Seaforths dash at the trenches, advancing by rushes and pouring in a heavy fire wherever Boers were visible. But the frightful loss in officers could not be replaced, and the attacks, though heroically made, lacked unison and support. The broken waves of onset beat helplessly against that iron ring of defence, and though small parties got within a few yards of the trenches, their devoted struggles availed nothing. Some were shot, some were taken prisoners. In one instance a young officer got within fifteen yards of the enemy before he fell. In another a body of Seaforths actually entered a trench and carried off six prisoners. Nothing showed the quality of the troops better than their resolute refusal, in the face of certain death, to accept defeat. But as a body, the Highland Brigade was wrecked. The four battalions lost forty-six officers, most of them in the horrible catastrophe with which the fight began. The men had the hardihood to remain in action, but most remained motionless, cowering under the storm of bullets and unwilling to rise. For three hours after dawn they lay in front of the enemy, the ground around them covered with dead and wounded. Half dazed by the disaster, unsupported except by the artillery, the Highlandmen continued the

unequal struggle. The crises of battles pass swiftly; the preparation may be long, but the decisive shock is usually short. Not so at Magersfontein. Here the victors dared not advance, the vanquished



DIAGRAMS OF THE BOER DISAPPEARING GUNS OF POSITION USED AT MAGERSFONTEIN WITH THE FIELD CARRIAGE DESIGNED TO GIVE THEM MOBILITY

would not retreat. For nearly ten hours, longer than the time in which Waterloo was fought, the wrecks of these fine battalions remained in position without water or food. The conditions of the Modder

River were repeated, with the addition of the ghastly butchery for which the day will be ever remembered.

Immovable in front of the Scotch Brigade, the Boers early attempted one of their favourite encircling movements against its right flank. The movement began with a furious fire from the trenches east of the hill, which, as the day drew on, extended along the bushy underfeature towards the river. At first there were only mounted troops available to

A BOER TRENCH AT MAGERSFONTEIN

meet this new attack, but they were boldly and successfully handled. At 7 a.m. Lord Airlie pushed forward two dismounted squadrons of the 12th Lancers, and these, aided by the "G" Battery and some mounted infantry, covered the exposed flank until the Coldstreams arrived. Two hours later the Guards came in action, the two battalions of Coldstreams on the left, the Grenadiers and part of the Scots Guards on the right. Covering a frontage of nearly two miles, they took up a position parallel

A SHOT FROM "JOE CHAMBERLAIN." FIRING THE NAVAL 4·7 INCH GUN AT MAGERSFONTEIN

to the Boer left, and for the remainder of the battle kept the enemy on the defensive. Down by one of the river drifts, the five companies of the Yorkshires guarded the extreme right. They had been sent to close the road to Jacobsdal, but the Boers were already in position, and the ford was not secured without sharp fighting. Finally the enemy was driven from a house near the river, and the Yorkshiremen got firm hold of the passage. Aided by a few Grenadiers and some mounted infantry, they maintained their ground till nightfall, thus crowning with a fine and judicious piece of work the brilliant part they had played during Methuen's march.

So the fight stood still upon the right, neither side attempting to gain ground. On the other edge of the field was the naval gun beside the railway, protected by the Loyal North Lancashires. Since dawn it had been pouring lyddite upon the hills at a range of about four miles, in the hope of quelling the hostile rifle fire. Further in advance the Howitzer Battery maintained a heavy cannonade at 4,000 yards, and still nearer the Highland Brigade, at the distance of a mile, the field batteries were doing all that man could do to relieve their sorely tried comrades in front. They had pressed into action as soon as there was sufficient light to see, nor did they change their object until the Boer counter-attack developed upon the British flank, and they had to wheel to the right to meet it. Immediately the trenches, whose fire seemed silenced, poured a sharp volley on the limbers. No living thing, in fact, could move without becoming a mark for Boer bullets. But the range was too long for effective rifle fire, and later in the day the guns pushed in to 1,200 paces, while the howitzers closed up and redoubled their fire. But it was upon the horse battery that the heaviest work fell. It had galloped with all the traditional dash of British artillery into the point of junction of the Boer left and centre, and remained in this seemingly precarious position throughout the day, raking the trenches around the base of the hill as well as those running towards the river, and expending about 200 rounds per gun. Undoubtedly it had a large share in stopping the Boers from advancing. Rarely throughout the campaign did those cautious warriors dare to meet our shrapnel in the open.

About midday the Boers appeared to be receiving reinforcements from Spytfontein, and Lord Methuen at length sent forward the Gordons to support the Highland Brigade. The victors of Dargai pushed forward in extended order, with pipes playing, closing up on the left of the Seaforths and Black Watch. They suffered but slightly in comparison with the other Scotch battalions, though out of thirty-nine casualties no less that five were officers. Indeed the vehemence of the fight seems about this time to have slackened, and it is possible

THE ARMOURED TRAIN AT MAGERSFONTEIN

that the weary monotony of the action would have been unbroken by any further change had not an unfortunate retirement subjected the line to fresh losses and confusion.

About two in the afternoon the Boer fire quickened on the right, and Colonel Halkett, whose battalion was still well in hand, swung his left round to meet it. This movement appears to have uncovered the right of the Gordons, and Colonel Downman, believing his position to be untenable, ordered his men to fall back. The retrograde movement, as is so often the case in war, affected the rest of the brigade, and the

men surged suddenly back, losing heavily as they did so, and only coming to a halt near the field batteries, where a line of scrub offered some shelter. Colonel Downman was mortally wounded, and the bonds of discipline seemed to be giving way.

Nevertheless, when Lord Methuen bade them hold their ground till night, the Highlanders rallied again, and the Colonel of the Seaforths, now in command of the brigade, partially succeeded in getting his battalion into line, at the same time ordering the rest to extend to the left. But so extensive a movement required time, and the confused or scattered units, here huddled in masses, there straggling over the field, many without leaders, do not appear to have got together till considerably later in the afternoon. It was past five o'clock when, as they were advancing into their places, the Boer guns, hitherto silent, suddenly opened fire, and their first shells told fatally upon the overstrained men. Once again they broke, and, staggering back, retired as far as the field hospital. For thirteen hours they had been under fire, and nerve and sinew alike had given way at last.

With the retreat of the brigade the main interest of the drama of Magersfontein ends. The fighting lasted till 7.15 at night. Just as they had covered the flank of the attacking force in the morning, the Guards now covered its retreat. Under the fire of the British guns the enemy made no attempt to press, and the thin line of infantry held their ground stubbornly in front of the trenches till darkness fell.

Throughout the night the Guards lay on the veldt, for there were still hopes that Cronje would retire as he had done at the Modder, and men even spoke of rushing the position with the bayonet. Some crept so near that they could see the Boers in the trenches refreshing themselves with gin, but no effort was made to surprise them. The troops were incapable of further effort, and Lord Methuen probably acted wisely in withdrawing next morning when he found the position still occupied. The retirement was effected under a heavy but ineffective shell fire, and by midday all except the doctors and the wounded were back in camp.

Too much credit cannot be given to the ambulance work throughout the battle. In the heaviest fire bearers and surgeons acted with

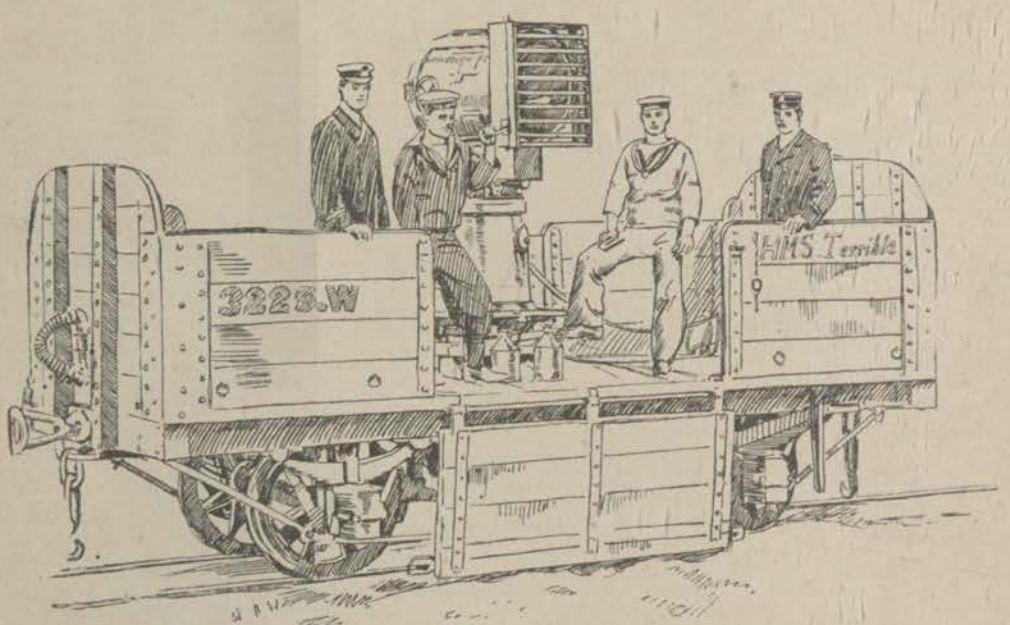
splendid coolness and devotion, and so effective were their endeavours

GENERAL WAUCHOPE'S GRAVE AT MAGERSFONTEIN

that in the following night 500 wounded were sent back to the Orange River. From the extreme right, where three men of the Mounted

Infantry covered the withdrawal of their wounded by turning on a body of Boers in the open and checking them by the unassisted fire of their own rifles, to the left, where Dr. Ensor coolly braved the storm of shot to succour a Gordon Highlander, the field was filled with high deeds of self-sacrifice. Everywhere was the devotion apparent that loves to call itself by the simple name of duty.

But no gallantry or energy could palliate the horrors of Magersfontein. The awful suddenness of the catastrophe which had befallen the Highland Brigade, the sufferings of the unfortunates lying for many hours on the wide expanse of veldt without relief, and the



A NAVAL SEARCHLIGHT FLASHER MOUNTED ON A RAILWAY TRUCK

depression of the ensuing days will not easily be forgotten. The tragic side of war overshadowed every other. To the bitter sense of defeat was added the regret for useless sacrifice, for the piteous ruin of a noble body of men who had represented all that is best and most brilliant in the profession of arms. A thrill of pity and terror ran through England when the news arrived. In these days the nation is more alive than formerly to the sufferings of the individual, but it was not these that then weighed most heavily upon it. For the semi-destruction of the Highland Brigade seemed to involve the overthrow of glorious, we may fairly say happy, traditions. There

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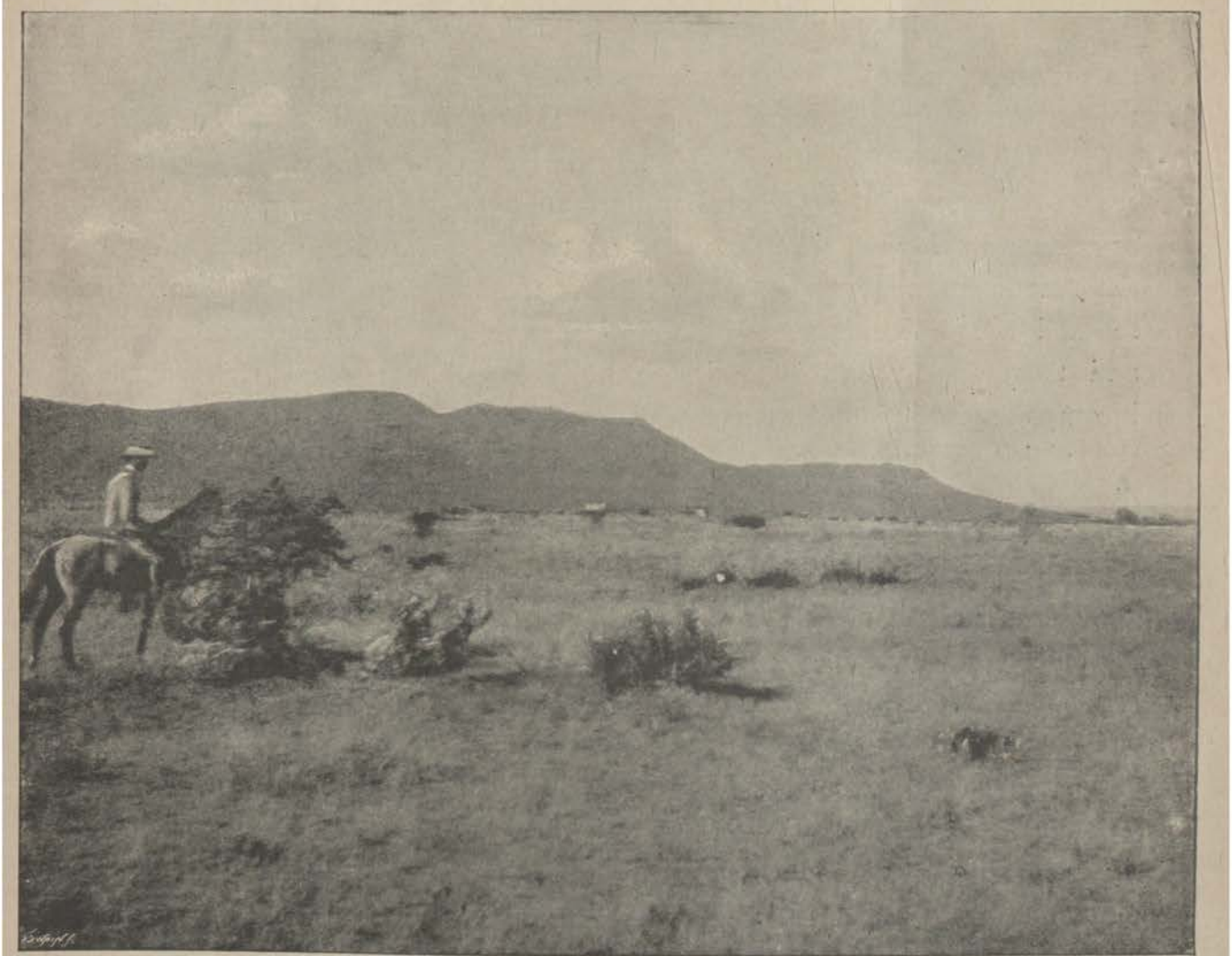
arose a fierce sense of unmerited injury, of the cruelty of the fate that could break the hearts of such soldiers as Wauchope's. Impelled by that angry throb of resentment criticism forgot her true functions and turned accuser.

The time has not yet come when the faults and mishaps of Magersfontein can be discussed with the moderation born of a full



THE OPEN COUNTRY AT MAGERSFONTEIN WHERE THE HIGHLANDERS SUFFERED

knowledge. But there are two principal questions on which the future critic will concentrate his attention: firstly, was the plan of attack well conceived? secondly, was its execution judicious? To conceive is the duty of the general; to execute is the business of his subordinate. These two functions must necessarily to some extent be

merged in each other, so nearly in the field of action, and above all in war, is the one the complement, if not the equivalent, of the other. At the same time it is usually possible to trace the dividing line, and the case of Magersfontein is no exception to the general rule. We characterised Lord Methuen's plan as bold; we should hesitate to say that it was rash and overweening. Such a condemnation could only be based on two grounds, the impregnable nature of the Boer defences, and the unjustifiability of the risk run in a night attack. On neither of these points can a dogmatic judgment be given. The determination to attempt a surprise, in itself defensible enough, is largely affected by the sufficiency of the General's information as to the enemy's position, or rather by how far he was entitled to believe in the thoroughness of the reconnaissances on which that information was based. Clearly he realised the difficulties with which his scouts had been obliged to cope; and to judge from his despatch he inferred therefrom the possible incompleteness of their survey. In so far as the line of trenches in the plain are concerned, it was certainly wanting, for so far as the disposable material allows us to determine there is no reason to believe that the British Staff was aware of their existence.

Putting aside the possibility of misleading reports from his subordinates, we can only say that as far as Lord Methuen himself is concerned, he was satisfied with the knowledge he possessed, and that acting upon it he gave the orders for the attack. Having regard to the frequent teaching of military history, it will probably be admitted that in thus taking his decision upon what he must have felt to be incomplete information, he was only doing what many great soldiers have found themselves forced to do. At the same time it should be remembered that, as far as we know, the one reason for immediate action, certainly not a negligeable one, was the fact that Cronje was growing stronger with every day's delay, and that a successful night attack necessarily presupposes a more accurate acquaintance with the enemy's position than any other kind of operation. It is upon such varying considerations that the soundness of Lord Methuen's plans must ultimately be judged.

Until their relative importance is set in a clearer light by further reliable information, the question as to whether or not the British com-

AFTER MAGERSFONTEIN

"When the cease fire sounded the British ambulance men went out with stretchers and waggons. The Boers insisted on blindfolding our men, and thus we rescued our wounded and dying."

mander should have attacked when and as he did, must remain a matter of speculation, even for those who were actually present.

As to the execution of the plan, it is now clear that the over-night bombardment was a mistake, as allowing the enemy time to recover from its effects, whatever they may have been, and as indicating too plainly the direction of the coming assault. This artillery preparation was part of Lord Methuen's plan, and for the disadvantageous results arising therefrom he must be held responsible. The cause of the disaster to the Highland Brigade was totally different. It is clear from the despatch that beyond the general order to assault the Magersfontein hill at dawn, Major-General Wauchope had a free hand. He was entrusted with the arrangement of details and the assignment of the part which each battalion was to play.

To the belated order to deploy was unquestionably and primarily due the dreadful slaughter that ensued. The probability that the Boers were put on the alert by two accidental rifle shots and kept well informed of our movements by means of lantern signals explains their preparedness, but offers no useful criterion of our leadership. The fact remains that the Brigade arrived in a dense formation within some 500 yards of the kopje, not to mention the unknown trenches which were 200 yards in front of its base. In the mind of certainly one officer, Major Benson, the guide, it should have deployed 200 yards sooner. So much is clear; it is far harder to discern the reasons of Wauchope's miscalculation. Either he intended, which in the face of the experience of Belmont, seems incredible, to get within 600 yards of the enemy's position before attempting to deploy, or he believed it to be more distant than it actually was. Yet he must have known that it was long past 3.25 a.m., the hour at which his troops were expected to be at "the point of assault." Possibly he made too great an allowance for the halts and deviations of the night march, possibly the darkness of a cloud-covered sky misled him. That so experienced a soldier should have made so vital an error is itself a fact that must give pause before we rashly condemn. Many palliations will no doubt in future be offered, and be eagerly and generously welcomed by all who knew General Wauchope and all who

love the fame of a noble and high-minded soldier. In the meantime, it should be clearly understood that Lord Methuen had not, nor could have had, any direct share in the misfortune of the Highland Brigade. This fact is so elementary that had not the contrary been widely bruited, no mention of it would have been needed.

THE GREAT TRENCH IN WHICH THE BOERS WERE HIDDEN AT MAGERSFONTEIN

Of the rest of the fighting there can be but one opinion. Throughout the long and exhausting ordeal infantry, cavalry, and artillery showed splendid courage, loyalty, and devotion. The prompt action of the 12th Lancers, the dash of "G" Battery, the steady perseverance of the field batteries, the steady constancy of the Guards and Yorkshiremen, were all in the highest degree admirable.

Four-fifths of the British losses fell upon the battalions of the Highland Brigade. Excluding the Gordons, the following are the approximate figures:—

	Killed.		Wounded.		Missing.		
	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Total.
Staff	1	...	2	...	...	...	= 3
Black Watch	6	59	11	200	...	78	= 354
Seaforths	4	34	7	142	1	23	= 211
Argyll and Sutherland	2	19	4	61	1	7	= 94
Highland L. I.	2	10	7	68	...	2	= 89
	15	122	31	471	2	110	751

The Guards Brigade had only about a hundred casualties, and ninety of these were in the Coldstreams, the 1st battalion losing sixty-five men, including Colonel Codrington and four other officers, wounded; the 2nd lost one officer, Lord Winchester, who owed his death to his reckless courage. Next to the Coldstreams came the 12th Lancers, with twenty casualties. The other items were insignificant.

The Boer losses, as at the Modder, are quite impossible to estimate. If they were officially stated as seventy killed and 203 wounded we may safely say, in making allowance for our enemy's arithmetic, that it equalled or exceeded our own. One Boer doctor was reported to have placed it at 1,500; an intercepted letter spoke of 473 dead and 600–700 wounded. One Boer commandant admitted to having thirty-six men killed out of a commando of 500. The Scandinavian contingent was said to be destroyed. It is pretty clear that the damage, if done at all, must have been done by our guns, which went into very close range and had no hostile artillery to answer till the end of the day. This yielding to the desire to save their cannon may have cost the Boers very dearly, and was in every sense thoroughly bad policy. They may have been cowed by the fear of the lyddite bursting on the rocky ridges where their heavy ordnance stood. Throughout the battle they only showed three guns, though during the British retirement on the next day they poured in a very heavy fire. Possibly most of their artillery was at Spytfontein. If our shells really swept their trenches the endurance of their riflemen was marvellous. Though partly saved by the softer soil at the foot of the kopjes, the effects of the fire must

A PIQUET CROSSING THE PONTOON BRIDGE OVER MODDER RIVER

have been terrible. Towards the end of the day a few were seen leaving their defences, but the main body remained to the end. They showed no elation at the result of the battle. A dead silence reigned along their works, like the hush that stole over the ghastly field of Borodino; and the men sat exhausted, awed at the slaughter and the obstinacy of their antagonists.

Magersfontein closed Lord Methuen's active campaign, and indefinitely postponed the relief of Kimberley. The Highland Brigade was incapable of further fighting, and the General dared not risk another blow. He sat down opposite his enemy, strengthening his position as well as he could, and watching with special care his long line of communication. For more than two months he was to remain motionless on the Modder, behind him the forty miles that he had won by such desperate fighting. This is not the place to indulge in general criticism, favourable or unfavourable, of the operations which came to so painful a termination. It would, indeed, be the height of folly and presumption to do so. Nor is it necessary to emphasise the fact that war is the most difficult of all arts, for the repetition of a truth worn threadbare is not likely to disarm criticism, even if we wished to do so. It will be wiser shortly to recapitulate certain facts which, together with those as yet unknown to the public, must form the basis on which the future judgment of the historian must rest.

Lord Methuen left the Orange River with definite orders to relieve Kimberley. He found himself compelled to fight offensive battles under conditions hitherto unrealised and by very few foreseen. He had great difficulty in procuring intelligence from the hostile Dutch, while his weakness in cavalry prevented him from supplementing his intelligence department by a bold and energetic use of that arm. Insufficiency in transport tied him to the railway line, and fatally hampered his power of manœuvring to a flank. To his column fell the task of undertaking the first genuinely offensive operations, and with it the bitterness that so often attends upon a first experience, when that disadvantage is not neutralised by that rare ability which men call genius, and which is able to learn for itself. He was opposed to a foe who not only took good care never to engage himself too heavily, but who was peculiarly

favoured by the conditions of ground and by his far greater mobility; a foe who laid little importance on the possession of the field of battle, or who only held it so long as he could inflict loss without incurring it. Our infantry, trained to believe that the climax of every battle was a torrent-like assault and that victory lay in the seizure of the position, suffered severely under the fire of this unattainable enemy, whose Parthian system, though less heroic, was perfectly suited to a vast theatre war, in which twenty miles of ground one way or the other mattered little. The British force of mounted men was so small that it could be checked by a few well-posted riflemen, and was consequently incapable of the wide turning movements which characterised General French's tactics later on. With all these encumbrances and disadvantages the English commander had to cope. Whether in the face of them his efforts were always signalised by insight and judgment is a question which, as has been said before, cannot now fairly be answered. Meanwhile, we should remember not merely that his position was extremely arduous, but what his difficulties actually were.

The story of his march does not attract by the brilliancy of its strategy: his battles have too much of the "bludgeon" element in them to interest tacticians; a little is achieved by mighty endeavour, sometimes, as in the case of the Grenadiers and Marines at Belmont and Graspan, by deplorable expenditure of life. But the glory of the march is the heroism of the troops. To the end the British soldier rises to the task. Time after time the position is stormed, the battle is won because the soldier will not be denied. With a proud self-consciousness men and officers alike stride on to the work, the veldt yellow and shadowless beneath them, the sun glowing like a furnace above, the invisible enemy awaiting their defenceless advance. His fire opens, but he cannot stop them; pause they may, but only to gather fresh strength: surprised, they turn the fiercer upon the lurking foe, hurried on by an uncontrollable impulse to attain and to strike. Such are and ever will be the first qualities of the soldier, without which calculation and subtlety are vain and strategy a hollow sound.

Rarely have men been more severely tried by conditions of climate,

or more suddenly called upon to face a kind of warfare whose difficulties they had never properly grasped. Never did the single courage and will of the soldier pass the ordeal more triumphantly. The British tactical system was actually inferior to that of the enemy; it was their unaided resolution never to endure defeat which bore them on in spite of cool and subtle opposition.

But the wave failed to surmount the final barrier. Slowly and reluctantly it receded into stagnation until a more irresistible tide directed and controlled by a masterly hand swept away the obstacles which had checked its earlier and narrower course.

CHAPTER XIII

STORMBERG

ADVANCE OF THE BOERS IN THE NORTH OF CAPE COLONY—COURAGE OF HUGO—BURGHERSDORP AND COLESBERG OCCUPIED—BRITISH MEASURES—ARRIVAL OF GATACRE—REINFORCEMENTS TO NAAUWPOORT—FRENCH AT HANOVER ROAD—ADVANCE OF GATACRE TO PUTTER'S KRAAL—HALT FOR REINFORCEMENTS—SHOULD HE HAVE REOCCUPIED STORMBERG?—DECEMBER 5TH, POSITION OF GATACRE—HE RESOLVES TO ATTACK—HIS PLAN—FORCES AVAILABLE—JOURNEY TO MOLTENO—THE NIGHT MARCH—COLONEL EDGE'S ADVENTURES—GATACRE'S GUIDES—LOSS OF THE WAY—DISPOSITION OF THE TROOPS AT DAWN—SURPRISED IN COLUMN OF FOURS—THE DASH OF THE IRISH RIFLES—FAILURE OF THE ATTACK—ARTILLERY IN ACTION—ATTEMPT OF MOUNTED INFANTRY ON THE LEFT BAFFLED—END OF THE FIRST STAGE OF THE FIGHT—RETREAT OF INFANTRY—RETIREMENT TO MOLTENO—EXHAUSTION OF TROOPS—LOSSES ON BOTH SIDES—PAUSE IN THE OPERATIONS—COMMENTS—POSITION IN CAPE COLONY IN THE MIDDLE OF DECEMBER

WHILE Lord Methuen was hurrying from fight to fight on his way to Kimberley, the troops destined to check the Boers on the south border of Cape Colony had been slowly concentrating on the east of his line of advance. From Aliwal North, Bethulie, Norval's Pont, and the Colesberg Waggon Bridge—that is to say, on a front of nearly ninety miles—the invaders pressed southwards upon Burghersdorp and Colesberg. Already on the 1st of November 3,000 Boers were reported to have reached Bethulie under the command of Du Toit. On the same day another commando crossed at Colesberg. Advancing with an almost superfluous caution, and relying largely upon the disloyalty of the Cape Dutch, the enemy threatened Burghersdorp on the 6th and entered it on the 8th, the Berkshires and the naval detachment being ordered to evacuate Stormberg, overhastily perhaps, on the 7th. On the 13th Aliwal North was occupied by 450 men and one gun, and a proclamation annexing the town and the surrounding district was immediately issued. Not, however, without protest; for Mr. Hugo and the assistant magistrate, Van Reenan, boldly protested, and

summoned a meeting of loyalists. But the demonstration — thanks to the treachery or faint-heartedness of the most important local representatives of the Cape Government—failed, and Hugo had to fly for his life to Queenstown. Next day—the 14th—Burghersdorp was likewise occupied in force by the Rouxville and Bethulie commandos and 100 rebels, who adopted a blue and yellow badge as marking and recognising their own special and separate status in the Boer army.[1] On the 15th Colesberg fell into the hands of the enemy, over 1,000

QUEENSTOWN FROM BOOKER'S KOP

Boers being reported as arrived, and 1,500 more as expected. This advance was followed by the high-handed measures generally and successfully adopted by the enemy. By November 17th the whole country north of a line drawn from Burghersdorp to Colesberg was in Boer hands—a prey to terror and disaffection.

Meanwhile measures were in progress on the British side. On November 15th General Buller had telegraphed that Sir William

[1] *Times*, December 20, 1899.

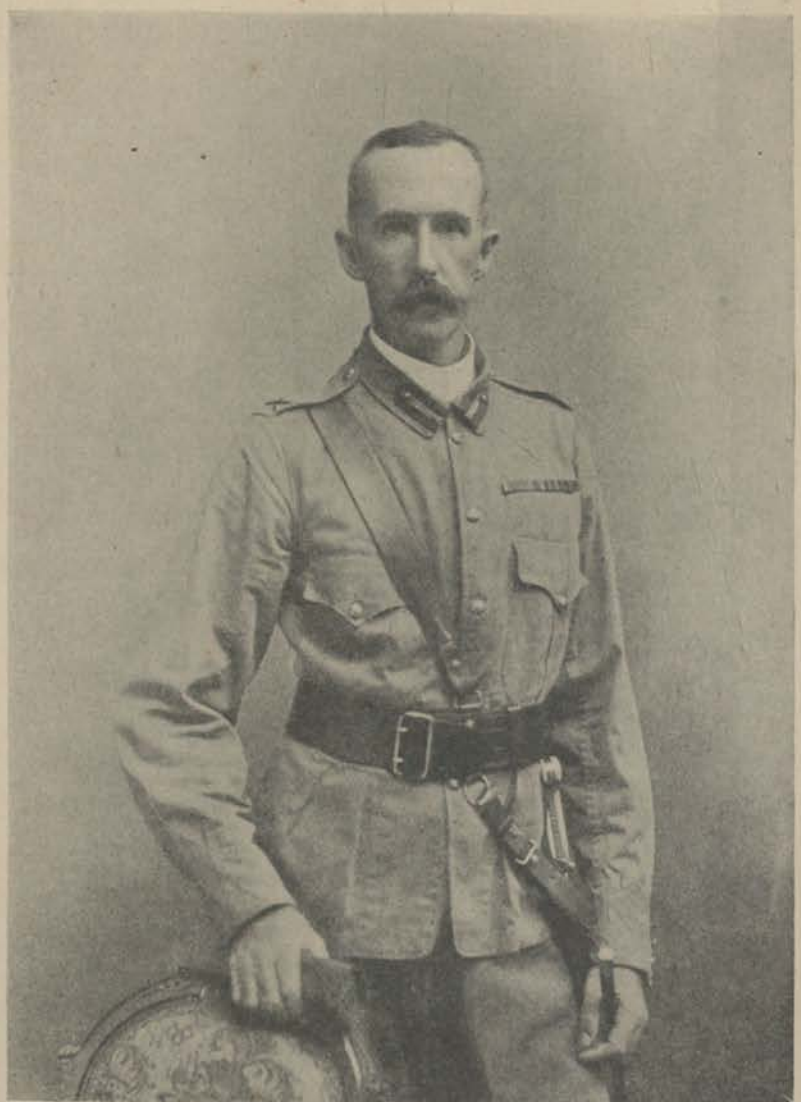
A BOER COMMANDO ENTERING ALIWAL NORTH

Gatacre and a battalion of the 7th Brigade would land at East London, and three days later the Lieut.-General, with the Royal Irish Rifles, reached the port. The New South Wales Lancers were sent from De Aar to Naauwpoort to support the Cape Mounted Rifles. General French's force was increased from the Cape Town line as far as circumstances permitted, and on the 22nd that able soldier himself was at Hanover Road. Here for the present he stayed, closing the central or Naauwpoort line of invasion. It remained for Gatacre to meet the enemy to the eastward.

The advanced post of the British on this side was at Bushman's Hoek between Sterkstroom and Molteno, the rugged pass by which the railway and the road crossed the hills. It was held by a detachment of Kaffrarian Rifles. Gatacre personally reconnoitred the position on the 21st, and on the next day hurried forward the Berkshire Mounted Infantry, the Irish Rifles, and some of the Cape Mounted Police to Putter's Kraal, four and a half miles south of Sterkstroom as a support to the detachment at Bushman's Hoek; but being too weak to push an offensive movement, he halted here, and did not reoccupy Stormberg, which was not entered by the enemy until four days later. This has been imputed to the British commander as a fault, but the criticism is baseless. At that moment he could only dispose of one battalion, two untrained and unequipped squadrons of Brabant's Horse, and 120 Queenstown Volunteers; and to push such a force, without artillery or transport, to an isolated position 55 miles away would have been too dangerous. Moreover, he had been promised reinforcements at an early date.

By December 5th the situation had somewhat developed. A commando of rebels, 300 strong, coming from Barkly East, had reinforced the Free Staters under Olivier at Stormberg, while the English force had been strengthened by the 74th and 77th batteries of field artillery, a company of engineers, and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers. Two hundred mounted men were at Bushman's Hoek, and a company of Kaffrarian Rifles, fifty strong, were at Sterkstroom. The main body lay at Putter's Kraal, 250 of Brabant's Horse covering the right flank at Penhoek, some twelve miles east of Sterkstroom.

Gatacre's position was one of grave difficulty. For the moment he could expect no further reinforcement, and he had no cavalry. His two companies of mounted infantry under Captain Dewar had just received their horses and were training. The enemy, on the other hand,



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM GATACRE, K.C.B.

were recruiting freely amongst the Dutch, and the complaints from the loyalists were loud and constant. The main Boer position at Stormberg interrupted the lateral communication with Methuen and French. Half-measures, such as the occupation of a position near Stormberg, would do little good. To advance without attacking

would obviously be a confession of weakness; so that there was no choice between complete inactivity and offensive operations. Such was the problem which awaited solution. Its difficulty arose from the disjointedness of the general plan. Not only was Gatacre separated from French by near 100 miles of rugged country, but there was no single brain to direct their columns and Methuen's to a common end. Each general had to shift for himself, and if, as in the present case, his resources were insufficient, had to make the best he could of them. Gatacre had either to remain inactive and so further the Boer cause, or play the game of gradual envelopment which French, with a

BURGHERSDORP

strong force of cavalry, afterwards employed so skilfully, or make a sudden and direct attack, so as to drive the enemy on Burghersdorp or Dordrecht.

It would probably have been better to wait until more troops reached him, but there were good reasons for immediate action, and the need of vigorous measures was strongly emphasised by most of those who could gain access to the headquarters. As he lacked the men, and, above all, the horses, for a wide encircling operation, the English Commander resolved to strike at once with all his available force at the knot of the Boer positions on the hills about Stormberg. His own fiery character was not such as to brook delay, and his unresting energy had overcome all difficulties of preparation. If sheer bravery

and determination alone were needed to make the operation a success, there was no cause for doubt as to its issue.

Judging from the most reliable sources of information at his disposal, Gatacre believed that he had some 1,700 Boers in front of him at Stormberg, with two or three guns. They were lying along the ridges and spurs on Rooi Kop, a considerable mountain south-east of the Junction. These heights could be commanded by artillery fire from some kopjes to

MOLTENO, ON THE STORMBERG (×), SHOWING THE RIDGES IN THE DISTANCE WHERE BOERS ATTACKED GENERAL GATACRE'S FORCES

the west of the Stormberg basin. The General resolved, therefore, to attack from that quarter, falling on the south-west face of the hostile position, so as to compel the Boers to quit their hold of the railway junction, and to retire northwards or eastwards. Like Lord Methuen, he pinned his faith on a surprise. As Putter's Kraal was some thirty miles from Stormberg, and the operation had to be executed in a single night, he determined to entrain his infantry as far as Molteno, which was nine miles distant from the Boer defences.

The advance was intended for the 8th, and the plan was actually known to the *Times* correspondent on the 7th, but its execution was postponed until the next day, owing to delay in getting together the necessary number of trucks. The fault lay with the railway authorities if with any one, but the fact that the line was a single one must have considerably increased the difficulty.

The force that actually took part in the movement consisted of the following:—

By train—74th and 77th batteries of Field Artillery, 2nd Northumberlands, 2nd Royal Irish Rifles.

By road, and from Bushman's Hoek—Three companies of Mounted Infantry, one of which belonged to the Berkshires.

160 men of Brabant's Horse, and 235 Cape Mounted Rifles, with four 2·5 guns and a Maxim, should also have marched from Penhoek, but, owing to the mistake of a telegraph clerk, did not put in an appearance. Four companies of the Berkshires remained at Queenstown; the remainder were away at Nauuwpoort under French. Two companies of Royal Scots were left at Molteno, one stayed behind at Bushman's Hoek with the Kaffrarian Rifles. Estimating the infantry battalions at about 900 men apiece, we have a total of about 2,000 rifles, of which 300 were horsed, and twelve field guns—not an overwhelming force to attack an extremely strong position manned by nearly the same number of enemies.

After two hours spent in shunting blocked trucks, the troops left Putter's Kraal in four trains, the last train reaching Molteno about nine in the evening. A short rest and a meal were taken in the market square, and the column started. It took the Steynsburg road, which runs north-west from the town, the intention being to march by moonlight to within about an hour of the point of attack, and then leaving the road on the left to move north-east and come in upon the right flank of the enemy. The distance was calculated at about ten miles. Owing to the mistake of a Cape Mounted Policeman, who acted as guide, the Field Hospital, the Bearer Company, with Captain Hall's Company of the Irish Rifles with a Maxim as escort and sundry ammunition waggons, all under the command of Colonel Edge, took the

A FORT AT BUSHMAN'S HOEK: THE ROYAL IRISH BREAKING CAMP PREVIOUS TO BATTLE OF STORMBERG

direct route to Stormberg, and lost touch with the column. They were warned of their mistake by a party of war correspondents, who on returning to Molteno found the commandant of the town and his civilian assistant to be under the same misapprehension. Ignorant of the true direction, Colonel Edge pushed on along the Stormberg road and bivouacked about seven miles from Molteno. At 2.30 a.m. he was joined by the reserve ammunition of the Northumberlands which had also lost its way. Dawn was breaking when Gatacre's position was located by the sound of the firing, and it was some time before the small but most important detachment reached the rear of the fight and its various components could be utilised. The incident is a significant comment upon the inherent difficulty of night operations, not to mention the unexplained fact of the total ignorance of the officers concerned as to the actual route that the main body had taken.[1]

While Edge's little column was wandering on along the wrong track, Gatacre was pushing steadily forward along the Steynsburg road, and after marching eight miles with the usual rests, halted near Roberts' Farm at 12.30 a.m. on the morning of December 10th. The moon had now set, and everything was in total darkness. The late start barely allowed one hour's rest, and about 1.30 a.m. the whole were again in movement. The chief guide now reported that the enemy's position was only one and a half miles away, but doubt soon arose as to the accuracy of this statement, and General Gatacre questioned Sergeant Morgan and the native guide. They replied that they knew the way perfectly, and were taking the column by a slightly longer road in order to avoid a bad piece of track, but that the difference in point of length was insignificant, and that the new road would ultimately lead to the desired spot.

The column, says General Gatacre, therefore proceeded, but half an hour after moving off, the officer commanding the Irish Rifles, reported that he thought the guide had lost his way. Again Sergeant Morgan was questioned, and again returned the same answer. The General then sent Morgan to the head of the column, and himself accompanied the Rifles, who were leading, constantly questioning the

[1] *Times* correspondent.

THE STORMBERG PASS

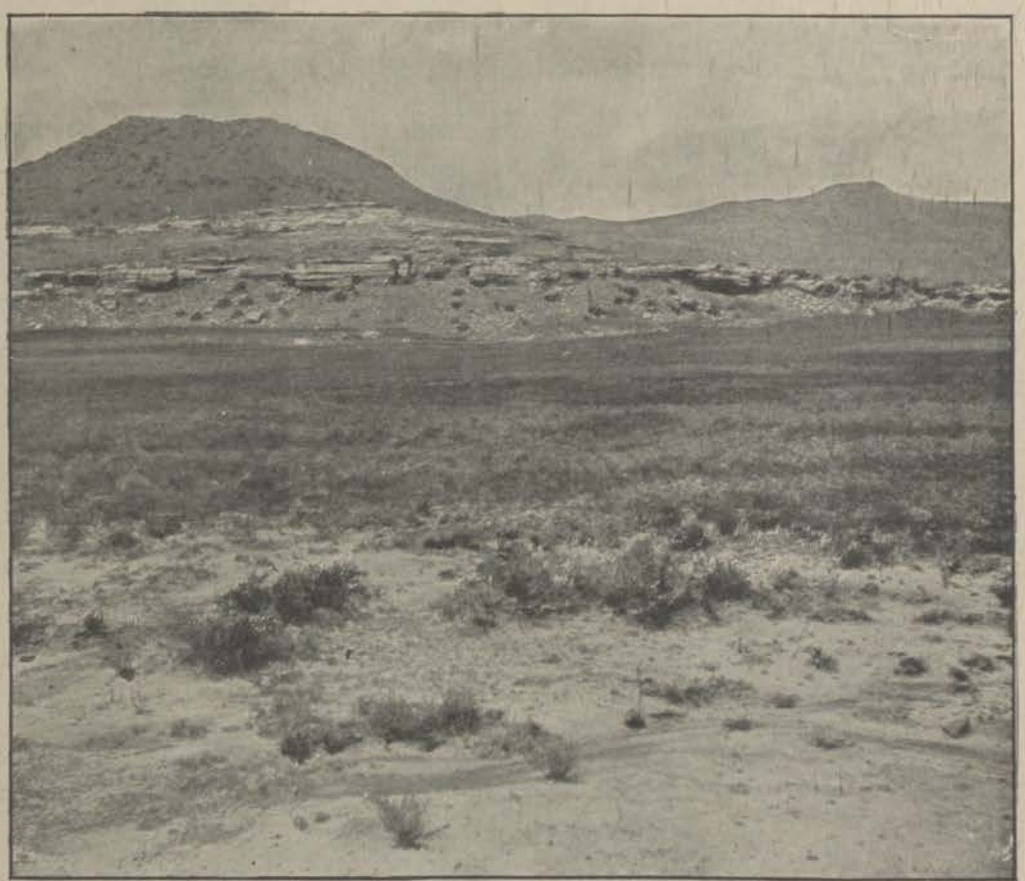
guide, who would only admit that the distance was greater than he had estimated. Just before dawn he pointed out the kopje which he affirmed to be Gatacre's objective. The General reckoned it as two miles distant, but as the rest of the road was reported good going, he resolved, despite the fatigue of the men, to push on and seize the position. "It became a question of doing this or retracing our steps to Molteno."

So the column plodded wearily forward, crossing on the way some hilly ground over which the General led his horse at the head of the line of march. From the top of this two hills could be seen with a rough and shallow valley between them, and beyond, a higher and more savage ridge running north and south, and divided from the smaller kopjes by a flat about 500 yards broad. It was determined to skirt the southern base of the lower hills and then wheel to the left, moving parallel to the steep rock slopes lying on the right hand.

By the time the wheel to the leftward was completed it was full daylight, though the column was still moving in fours. The Royal Irish Rifles were in front, followed by the Northumberlands, 74th Battery, Cape Mounted Police, Dewar's Mounted Infantry, 77th Battery, and Royal Berkshire Mounted Infantry. The mounted men had not moved out, and the "scouts" mentioned in some of the accounts, who probably constituted the "points," were unsuspiciously preceding the column at a short interval along the abrupt hillside. Suddenly from the crest of the ridge burst a violent fire, tearing the flank of the line of march and throwing the overstrained men into confusion.

Three companies of the Irish Rifles ran back and occupied the northernmost of the kopjes to the west, the remainder, with the Northumberlands, dashed at the rocks whence the fire proceeded. The confused mass pressed upwards towards the final wall of crag and schanse, men falling every step of the way, though, considering the desperate circumstances, the losses were slight. Splendidly led by the officers the Irish Rifles had got about half-way up the hill when they found themselves confronted by a sheer wall of stone, which forbade further progress. Here fell Colonel Eager and Major Seton, and with them most of the leaders of that reckless assault. Dazed and exhausted

those following paused; no formed bodies were below to reinforce the waverers or to attack the flanks of the rock. Scattered groups rushed upwards and withered away under the point blank fire; the greater part lay down behind the boulders and made no effort to aid the stormers. Unfed by fresh fuel the brief flame of onset died out, and the heart of two battalions had fretted itself away in the course of a few short minutes.



THE BOER POSITION AT STORMBERG WHICH THE NORTHUMBERLAND FUSILIERS AND ROYAL IRISH RIFLES TRIED TO STORM

The men scattered along the rugged slope without object or cohesion, for the suddenness of the fight had prevented regular formation. All Gatacre's infantry had been wasted in an attack upon a position which, under ordinary conditions, it would probably have carried.

Meanwhile, under a stinging fire, the batteries hastened to take up a position. The ground was frightfully rough, and No. 4 gun of the 74th was overturned in a deep watercourse; several of the detachment

THE NIGHT MARCH

were hit, four of its horses were killed, the others wounded. By dint of tremendous exertions and at very short range the remainder got into action on the kopje held by the Irish and mounted infantry, and opened a very rapid fire of shrapnel. Some shells, it is said, fell short, and burst among the infantry struggling on the brow of the hill. After the latter had fallen back, the Cape Police and part of the Mounted Infantry took up the contest, and pushed forward in the hope of turning the Boer right. But they were met with a heavy fire from a spur running out from the northern end of the ridge, and drew back under cover of the Rifles' kopje.

The artillery fire alone kept the fight on our side alive. The Infantry were so exhausted with want of sleep and hard marching that their musketry became fitful, and many fell asleep. Edge's detachment heard so little firing that they supposed a skirmish was in progress. Only the boom of the guns and the rattle of the maxims on the southernmost of the small kopjes were steadily audible. The Boers, indeed, shot wildly and fast, but their numbers, though constantly increasing, were small, and they seem only to have had two guns in action all day. For half an hour from the beginning this state of things continued. Then a sudden retirement of the Infantry brought on the second stage of the struggle.

Though the broken battalions had been partially covered by the boulders on the slope, below the schanses and rock walls, they could make no efficient reply to the rain of bullets which the enemy, soon reinforced from the rear of Rooi Kop, poured upon them. To allow them to lie there any longer would have been merely to postpone the inevitable hour of retreat at a useless cost. The Colonel of the Northumberlands gave the order to fall back, and all capable of obeying dashed back over the open ground between the fatal ridge and the next line of kopjes. The Irish Rifles followed their example, and the whole thronged across the flat under a furious storm of shot. Behind a low ridge, some 1,500 yards from the scene of their repulse, they reformed as best they could, the artillery covering their retreat with splendid steadiness. Retiring by alternate batteries, it reached a neck and here held its ground for half an hour, striving to silence a big gun which

Railway to Molteno—eleven miles

Bushman's Hoek

To Stormberg Station

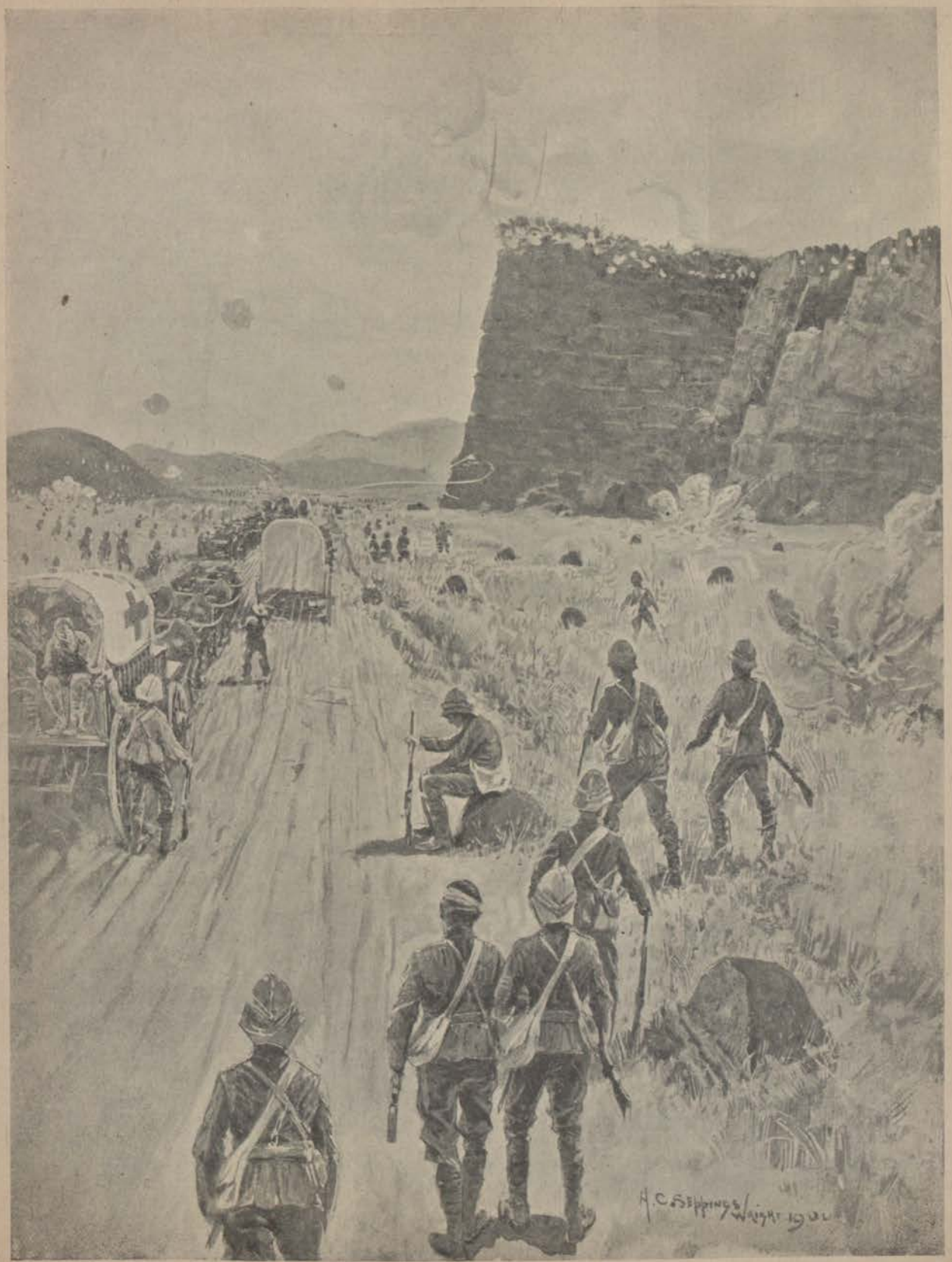
The road runs below this ridge

THE STORMBERG DISTRICT VIEWED FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE PASS

the Boers now unmasked. Under the heavy fire of shrapnel their main body made as yet no effort to advance, but parties galloped round on the flanks and endeavoured to encircle the British position. This, however, was frustrated by the mounted troops, Captain Amphlett's company of mounted infantry doing excellent work on the right, the flank it was most necessary to protect, as our line of retreat lay on that side. Behind the knoll clustered the two battalions, greatly confused and

THE DONGA WHERE THE ROYAL IRISH RIFLES WERE CAPTURED

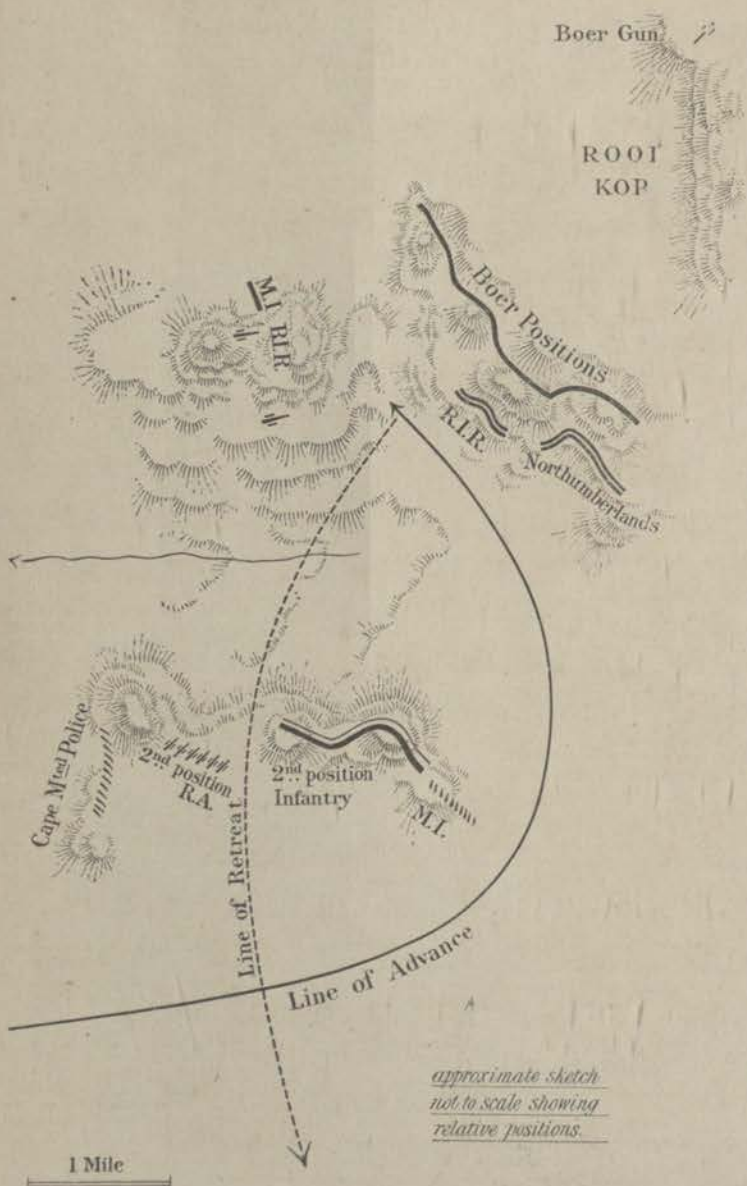
fatigued, but apparently little alive to the danger of their position. Many of the men were eager to go in again, but a second attack was out of the question. There was no reserve left, and the Boers were growing more numerous every minute. General Gatacre, who, during the action had remained on the kopje with the Rifles, resolved to retreat, and as soon as fugitives ceased to come back from the slope opposite, gave the order to retire on Molteno. The infantry were withdrawn



THE BRITISH RETIREMENT ON MOLTENO

first, their retreat being covered by the mounted men and the artillery, who lost a second gun in a quicksand.

The action had only lasted two hours, but previous fatigue had done more than the hostile fire. Nevertheless, when the order to retreat reached them, the infantry formed up and marched off steadily, though stragglers from the position they had endeavoured to take kept passing through the rearguard of mounted infantry, and gave the tail of the column the appearance of confusion. So feeble was the pursuit that the mounted men and the artillery who covered the movement never moved faster than a walk. The direction of the retreat to the road led partially across the hostile front, but no effort was made to head off the column, which was pursued by shells from the big gun alone. These were well aimed but failed to burst, and the casualties during the retirement were almost *nil*. Once a small party of Boers reached some heights above the track, but retired upon being fired at. Never was there such an opportunity missed. The exhaustion of the men was great. When after five weary hours they reeled into Molteno, they had covered close on



The FIGHT at STORMBERG, Dec. 10th

THE BRITISH PRISONERS IN THE HANDS OF THE BOERS AT WATERVAL

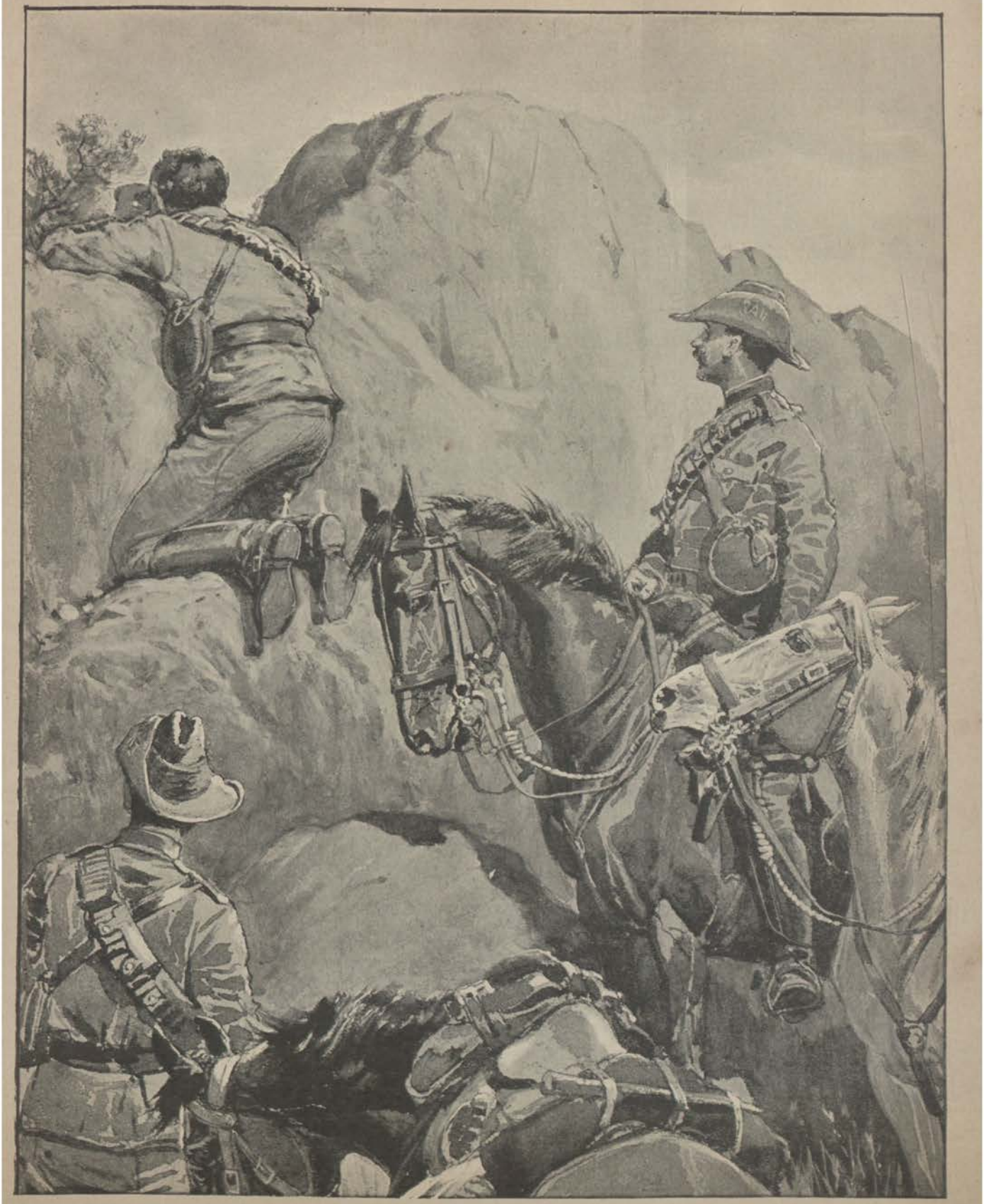
"Stormberg Avenue"

thirty miles, and that after a railway journey, and with only one hour's rest besides the regular halts. Their last meal, it would appear, had been eaten at Molteno on the preceding evening. To exhaustion alone is it ascribable that out of a total loss of 760, all but 95 were prisoners or missing. When the infantry fell back from the enemy's position over a third of their number remained behind, some fast asleep, some out of hearing, some indifferent. They appear to have allowed themselves to be taken without resistance, and that though many must have had plenty of ammunition. Such an incident is almost unheard of in the annals of the British Army, and is only referable to extraordinary circumstances As a combination of bad management and bad fortune, Stormberg was, perhaps, the saddest reverse of the whole campaign.

The Boer losses were probably very slight, indeed, the enemy reported none at all. In one sense their victory was pure luck, for they were quite unprepared, and their force was at first but a few hundreds strong. Afterwards, they were reinforced by the commandos of Olivier and Grobbler, and may have numbered 2,000 at the close of the engagement. Their generalship, as we have already said, lacked every quality that makes for success, unless we credit them with the self-restraint of the hunter. Their shooting was wild and bad, their tactics feeble and timid. A worse fought fight it is difficult to find in the history of war.

In the afternoon the remains of Gatacre's force entrained, the infantry going to Sterkstroom, the rest to Bushman's Hoek and Cypherghat. Brabant's Horse which arrived about the same time scouted towards Stormberg and saw a detachment of about fifty Boers, and a force estimated at 1,100 in position. Next morning the British withdrew, and there ensued a pause in the operations. Gatacre's infantry needed rest, and soon afterwards the Northumberlands were sent southwards to recruit and to be reorganised. The arrival of the Derbyshires and the 79th Battery enabled the General to maintain his position, but of offensive movements there was for a long time no further thought.

Military criticism is not the special province of this work, nor for



THE EYES OF THE ARMY: SCOUTS AT WORK

the most part, speaking of the campaign generally, are sufficient materials available to justify dogmatic assertion. But in the present instance we have as a guide the impartial opinion of the ablest and most experienced soldier that in recent times has directed the movements of British armies. Lord Roberts spoke with no uncertain voice as to the causes of the disaster at Stormberg. He attributed that most deplorable reverse to "reliance on inaccurate information regarding the ground to be traversed and the position held by the Boers, to the employment of too small a force, and to the men being tired out by a journey by train followed by a long night march before they came into contact with the enemy." He considered that when doubts arose as to the right direction Lieutenant-General Gatacre should have halted and endeavoured to find the proper road or should have fallen back on Molteno, and he pointed out that by taking the ordinary precaution of requiring a telegraphic acknowledgment of the receipt of the order to the mounted detachment at Penhoek the arrival of the latter would have been ensured. These last comments require no proof; the former are in the main amply borne out by the accounts of eye-witnesses. The strength of the British Column was determined more by circumstances than by choice, for the General employed, or intended to employ, every man under his command, with the exception of the four companies of Berkshires left at Queenstown, the small force at the important pass of Bushman's Hoek, the 100 men left behind at Sterkstroom, and the temporary garrison at Molteno. It was, however, unfortunate that with the exception of the mounted company, none of the Berkshires, who knew the district, were disposable, while the former, during the night march, were placed in the rear of the column. It was falsely stated that when the right turning of the road was passed two troopers reported the mistake. General Gatacre had only the opinions of his guides to rely on. He trusted implicitly to them, and, knowing the danger of delay, pressed forward.

More difficult is it to account for the extraordinary formation in which the infantry found themselves when the enemy opened fire. Evidently Gatacre did not think himself near the enemy's position, and intended to deploy when closer to the hill which Morgan had pointed out as his objective, and which just before dawn the General estimated

to be two miles away. "Dawn was just breaking, when the column was suddenly fired into." Other accounts say that it was then full daylight. In either case the two battalions were too late in getting into a formation adapted to the circumstances. According to the best information, the force was within two miles of the enemy, *i.e.*, within shrapnel range, just before dawn. The ground in front was rugged and steep, and quite unknown. It would have been well to have halted

ONE OF THE GUN PITS

the infantry and sent the mounted men on ahead. If this was considered likely to disconcert the plan of a surprise, the infantry should, according to the drill-book, have advanced in a threefold order, the attacking columns being preceded by "points" and advanced guards with an interval of one hundred to two hundred yards between each. If this was actually done, it would appear either that these covering parties imperfectly fulfilled their duty by reconnoitring only the lower ground in their immediate front, or that flankers to explore the fatal

ridge were not sent out at all. Whatever the explanation, the cardinal fact remains that the infantry were exposed to point-blank rifle-fire from a line of heights immediately overhanging their line of march, and that they were moving in column of fours. It had been intended that the Royal Irish Rifles should form the attacking column, the Northumberlands being in second line, but in the first confusion all the infantry became engaged, and no formed body was left to renew the attack or cover the retreat.

All comment, except what is actually based upon the known facts, is very unsatisfactory, and for the comprehension of this stage of the operations a good map is sorely needed. What were the exact positions which Gatacre expected to attack? Where was he surprised? What relation geographically did the one bear to the other? Was the General himself quite clear as to the spot where he wished to strike? Could the Boer positions be said to have been properly located at all? We know at least that the British commander had not been over the ground himself. Was not the information supplied by the Intelligence Department deprived of much of its value by the blunder of the guide? Till some of these questions are satisfactorily answered, the actual collision will remain shrouded in mystery. In exact proportion as a general knows or does not know must his calculations include or exclude the possibility of certain contingencies. Judging from the available facts, General Gatacre would seem to have known very little and to have acted as if he knew everything.

We should not be doing justice to General Gatacre, nor adequately express the spirit in which the above criticisms have been written, did we close our remarks here. We have stated the causes of the Stormberg repulse as accurately as we were able. For them, in as much as his despatch reflected in no way upon the action or judgment of his subordinates, the unfortunate Commander must be held responsible. To point out where a general has failed is often not particularly difficult: to apportion accurately the exact degree of blame requires a far greater knowledge of the circumstances than we can pretend to possess. Faulty intelligence, the unquestionably peculiar conditions under which General Gatacre had to act, and many other

details which it is either impossible or unnecessary here to enumerate, may mitigate future censure if they cannot eliminate it. War is a grim and dangerous occupation at the best. It is the most public and exacting of all forms of human activity. So tense are the feelings which it arouses, so easily does it lend itself to harsh and crude judgments, so clear do its issues appear to be, and so enormously difficult is successful performance, that the soldier walks, as it were, along the verge of an

THE BOER LAAGER AFTER EVACUATION

abyss of popular obloquy into which one slip on the precipitous heights above may on an instant plunge him. The code of military honour, so strictly bound up with the personal characteristics of integrity and strength, and so intolerant of excuse, further narrows the path which, in the public view, he is bound to tread, and increases the possible risk to his career. From all severe strictures we would strenuously dissociate ourselves. It will be more consonant with the generous spirit of the people of England to recall the high qualities which

General Gatacre showed at the moment of confusion and defeat, his splendid courage, his presence of mind, his indomitable energy, his firmness in the retreat, and his level-headed caution during the trying weeks that succeeded it. Let us remember that in forming his plan he boldly risked his gallantly-won reputation, and in the attack on Stormberg adopted a course which, in spite of the results, had almost every argument in its favour. We believe that its daring was justified, and that but for the errors in execution it would have succeeded. It is further worthy of remark that he retained the confidence of his men after the failure, and that they were more ready to ascribe their discomfiture to bad luck than to bad leadership, and this though the operation was productive of conditions most demoralising and disheartening to the soldier. In view of these facts no one can but regret the hard fortune which overtook one of the brightest names and most persevering leaders in the British army. Without exaggeration we may fairly say that General Gatacre failed where weaker men would not have dared.

So ended the first attempt of the British to penetrate from the south. Gatacre actually retired from Molteno at the very moment that Methuen's guns were bombarding the Boer position the evening before the assault at Magersfontein. With these two defeats the whole offensive strength of the Cape Colony forces was broken. All that the three British generals could do was to limit as much as possible the depredations of the enemy and to overawe by quick and sudden movements the spread of the rebellion on their flanks and rear. For more than eight weeks the Boers were free to try a vigorous offensive. Only in the centre at Colesberg did French's horsemen in a series of admirable and instructive operations succeed in baffling the enemy. Once again in an hour of sharp distress the eyes of England turned eagerly to follow Sir Redvers Buller. All hopes of rapid success after the landing of the Army Corps had come to nought: the most brilliant battalions in her army had been checked and heavily shaken, and the enemy had gained a stronger hold of Cape Colony. But in Natal troops were massing fast, the Boer offensive had been driven back, the reports from Ladysmith were brighter, and few people doubted but that

in a few days the town would be relieved. Men thought only of a crushing combination between White and Buller to the north of the Tugela and of the Boer army flying in wild confusion towards Newcastle. Such a victory would almost nullify the defeats of Methuen and Gatacre; the 5th Division would be thrown into the scale and ensure a rapid advance upon Pretoria. But a black week for our arms had begun with Stormberg and Magersfontein, and before it was over events had occurred in Natal which were to try more highly still the confidence and constancy of the country.

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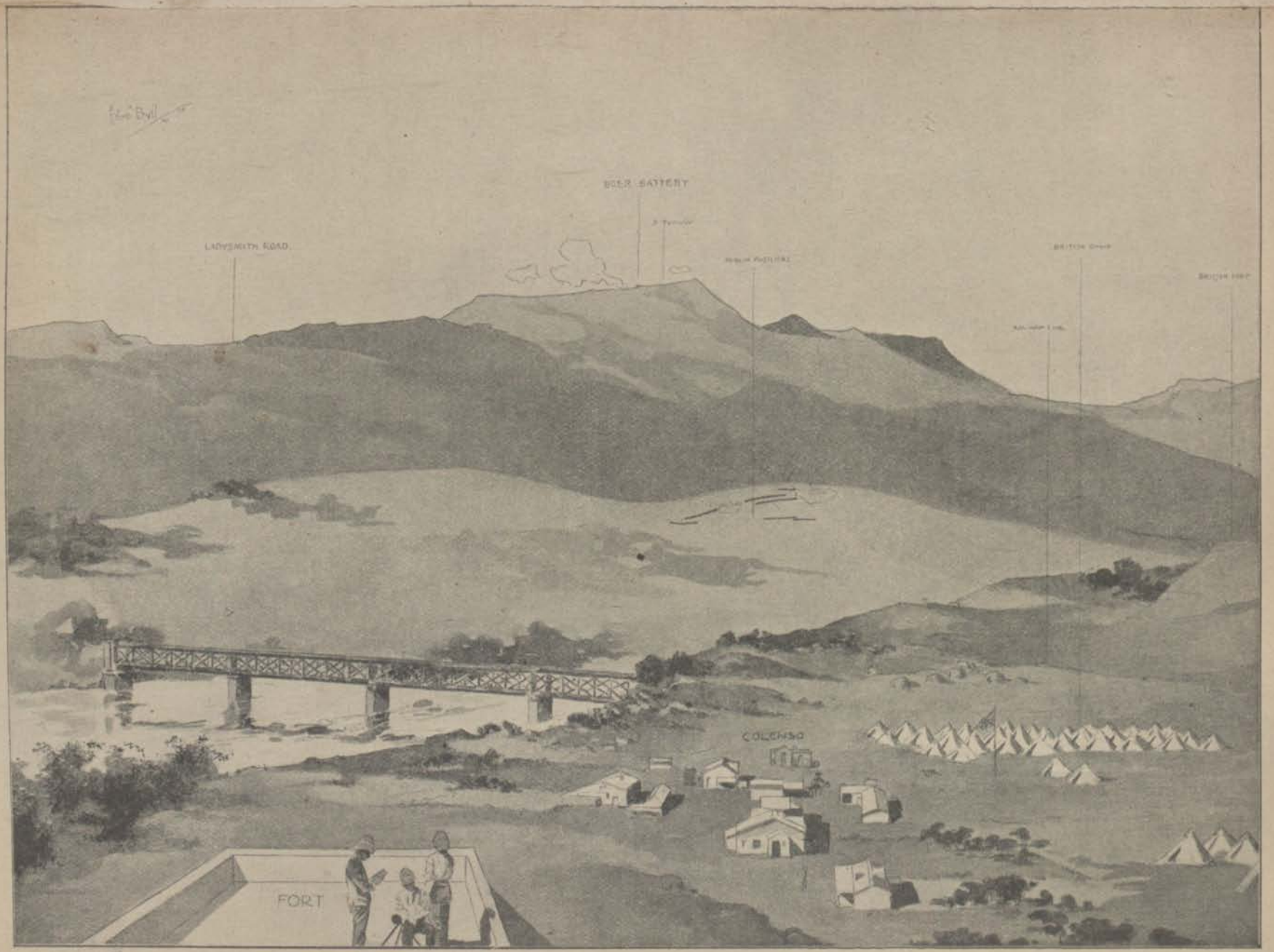
CHAPTER XIV

THE FIGHTING SOUTH OF THE TUGELA

EVENTS IN NATAL THAT FOLLOWED THE INVESTMENT OF LADYSMITH—MEASURES TAKEN FOR THE PROTECTION OF DURBAN—THE CAMP AT ESTCOURT—ADVANCE OF THE BOERS TO THE SOUTHWARD—COMMANDOS CONVERGING ON ESTCOURT—THE FIRST FIGHTING—THE DISASTER TO THE ARMOURED TRAIN—SKIRMISH OF NOVEMBER 18TH—ESTCOURT ISOLATED—FIGHT OF WILLOW GRANGE—MARCH OF HILDYARD SOUTHWARD—NIGHT ATTACK—THE POSITION CARRIED—RETREAT OF BOERS TO SECOND POSITION—FORCE ORDERED TO WITHDRAW—HEAVY ARTILLERY FIRE POURED UPON THEM—THE NAVAL GUN—LOSSES, ETC.—RESULT OF THE FIGHT—ADVANCE OF REINFORCEMENTS FROM DURBAN—BOERS ON THE MOOI RIVER—BARTON'S BRIGADE—RETREAT OF JOUBERT TO COLENSO—HE WITHDRAWS WITHOUT LOSS—END OF THE BOER OFFENSIVE—ADVANCE OF HILDYARD—REPAIR OF FRERE BRIDGE—ARRIVAL OF HART'S AND LYTTELTON'S BRIGADES—ADVANCE TO CHIEVELEY—SIR REDVERS BULLER ASSUMES COMMAND

THROUGHOUT the war the mobility of our enemies was, as a general rule, more remarkable than their swiftness in executing large schemes. With Ladysmith invested and the passages of the Tugela secured, they had an excellent opportunity of a bold dash into Southern Natal with all the men available from the siege, a raid which should have carried the invasion up to the lines of Durban, wrecking, if necessary, all communications to the north, and isolating and destroying any detachment which should dare to bar its progress. Such a force, lightly equipped, living on the resources of the country as it passed, and carefully horsed, should have forgotten its line of communications, and operated boldly upon the rear and flanks of the few British troops who were scattered along the main line of railway. The paucity of our mounted troops rendered perfectly safe a scheme whose results would inevitably have been to confuse and delay, even if no serious disaster had befallen the British arms. But in this instance, as in Cape Colony, during the same period, the movements of our enemy were slow, his tactics feeble and timid, his strategy over-cautious. For three weeks the whole of Southern Natal was guarded by a force which at



THE BRITISH POSITION AT COLENSO BEFORE THE EVACUATION

the end of that time numbered little more than one division, which the Boers had not diminished by 200 men.

Colenso had, as will be remembered, fallen into the hands of the enemy on the 4th of November, and the same day a proclamation was issued annexing the Upper Tugela district to the Orange Free State. Beyond patrols of Natalian horse no body of British troops remained north of Estcourt, thirty-five miles from the Tugela. Yet it was only on November 10th that the river was crossed by a strong Boer force under Louis Botha, and a week more elapsed before that commandant took up his position at Ennersdale, five miles from Estcourt, while part of his troops

THE IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE

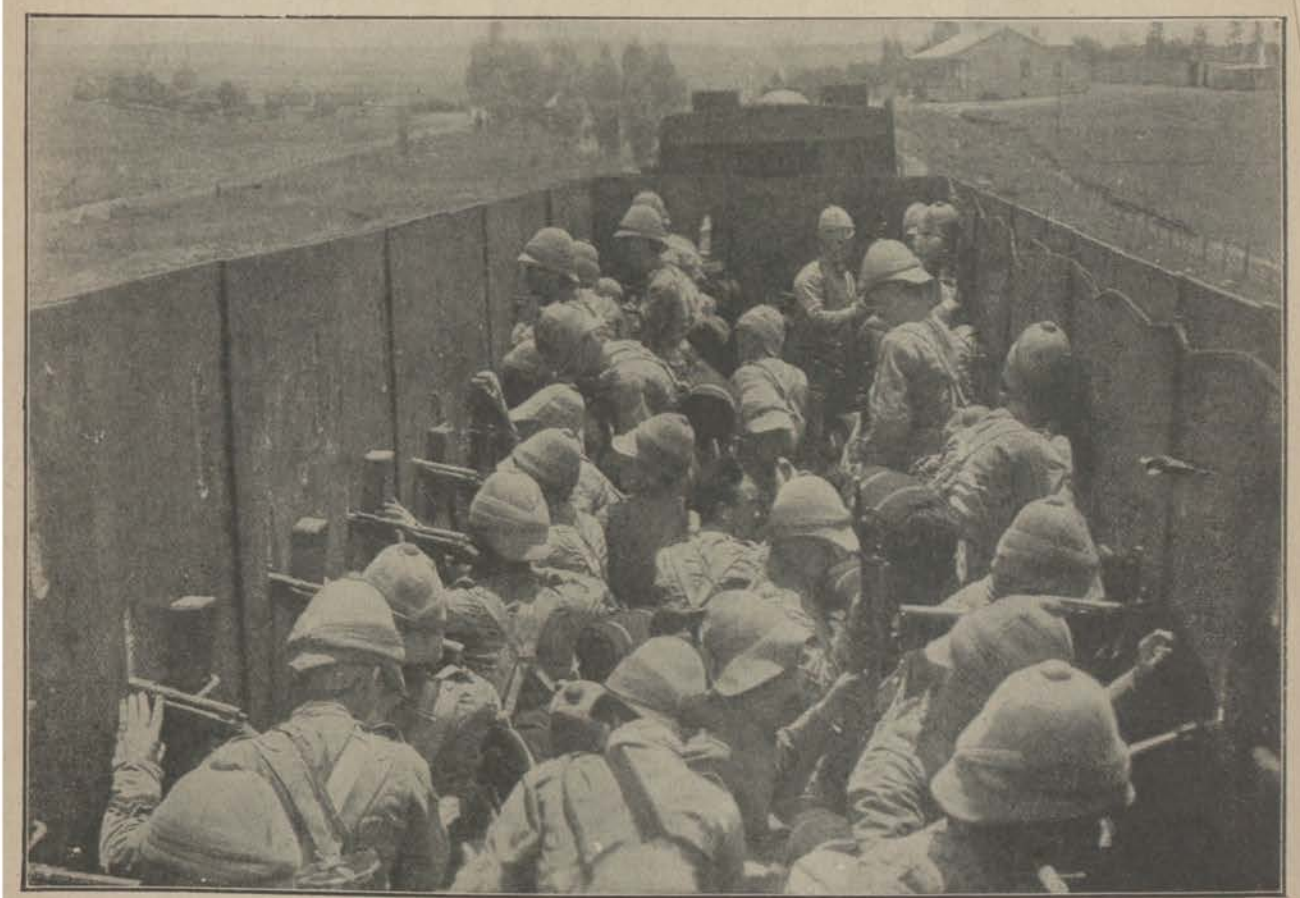
moved westward by Ulundi. On November 15th a third body left Weenen, striking for Highland Hoek, an important position just north of the Mooi River and south of Willow Grange. The total strength of these three detachments was about 7,000 strong. The object of their movements was Estcourt, where lay the small British force commanded at first by General Wolfe-Murray, afterwards by Colonel Long and Major-General Hildyard. Its infantry consisted of the Dublin Fusiliers, who had fought at Talana, the Border Regiment, under Colonel Kitchener, the West Yorkshires, and the Durban Light Infantry; two long naval 12-pounders and a Natal battery of 7-pounders composed the entire artillery; and there were besides detachments from the Imperial Light

ESTCOURT, OVERLOOKING THE LITTLE BUSHMAN'S RIVER BRIDGE

Horse, Natal Carbineers, and other irregular cavalry, numbering 600 or 800 in all. These 3,500 men formed nearly the whole of the troops disposable for the protection of Estcourt and the posts north of Pietermaritzburg. The latter was being sedulously prepared for defence, and Durban itself was manned by a strong naval brigade and heavy guns under the command of Captain Percy Scott, but Hildyard's force was the only barrier capable of checking the Boer invasion before it reached the coast. Whether it would finally arrest it depended upon the Boers themselves. They were far superior in numbers, in mobility, and in the range of their artillery; one bold, well-aimed stroke would clear their path to the sea, and bring with it results pregnant of misery to the loyalists and wide in their influence upon the waverers and the natives. Such an operation was certainly the object of our enemies, and among their rank and file existed little doubt of their ability to execute it. It is not likely that so clear-sighted a man as Joubert believed in the permanence of conquests south of the Tugela, though he must have recognised how favourable an opportunity had been presented to him to crush an important detachment and delay Buller's advance. But whether from over-caution or want of strength or preparations, valuable days were lost, and when the Boer general found himself strong enough to envelop Estcourt, the dangerous period had almost passed and troops were fast gathering to thrust him back. The lucky star of England was once again in the ascendant, and the penalty of defeat and isolation was not exacted by our enemy.

Estcourt is about 130 miles from Durban, seventy from Pietermaritzburg. Its importance was mainly due to its position on the Bushman's river. The small collection of houses nestles in a hilly cup surrounded on all sides by gentle undulating ridges similar to our Downs, which offered no tenable position for so small a force. All that could be done in case of attack was to hold the hills to north, east, and west as long as possible and then to fall back behind the town to the ridge where Fort Durnford stands. Every day an armoured train was sent forward towards Colenso, and the Irregular Horse scouted untiringly along the crests of the flanking ridges. It was generally felt that the place was held on sufferance only, and when the alarm gun was fired on the morning of the 14th men presaged retreat.

But the day passed comparatively quietly. The Boers showed in considerable numbers, but they made no effort to press, and the fighting was confined to cavalry affairs. Still the tension was unrelieved, and the troops passed a cold and miserable night, ultimately finding some cover in some of the railway sheds, for the tents had been struck in anticipation of a speedy departure. Nothing could be certainly known, and a rapid march might be necessary when the sun rose, whether to



IN AN ARMOURED TRAIN

escape or attack. At dawn the scouts went out again and the armoured train started on its last fatal trip.

It left Estcourt at 5.30 a.m. Reckoning from its front, it consisted of an open truck, in which was placed a muzzle-loading 7-pounder, served by four sailors from H.M.S. *Tartar*; a loopholed, armoured car, carrying three sections of a company of Dublin Fusiliers, the engine and tender, and two more armoured cars with the fourth

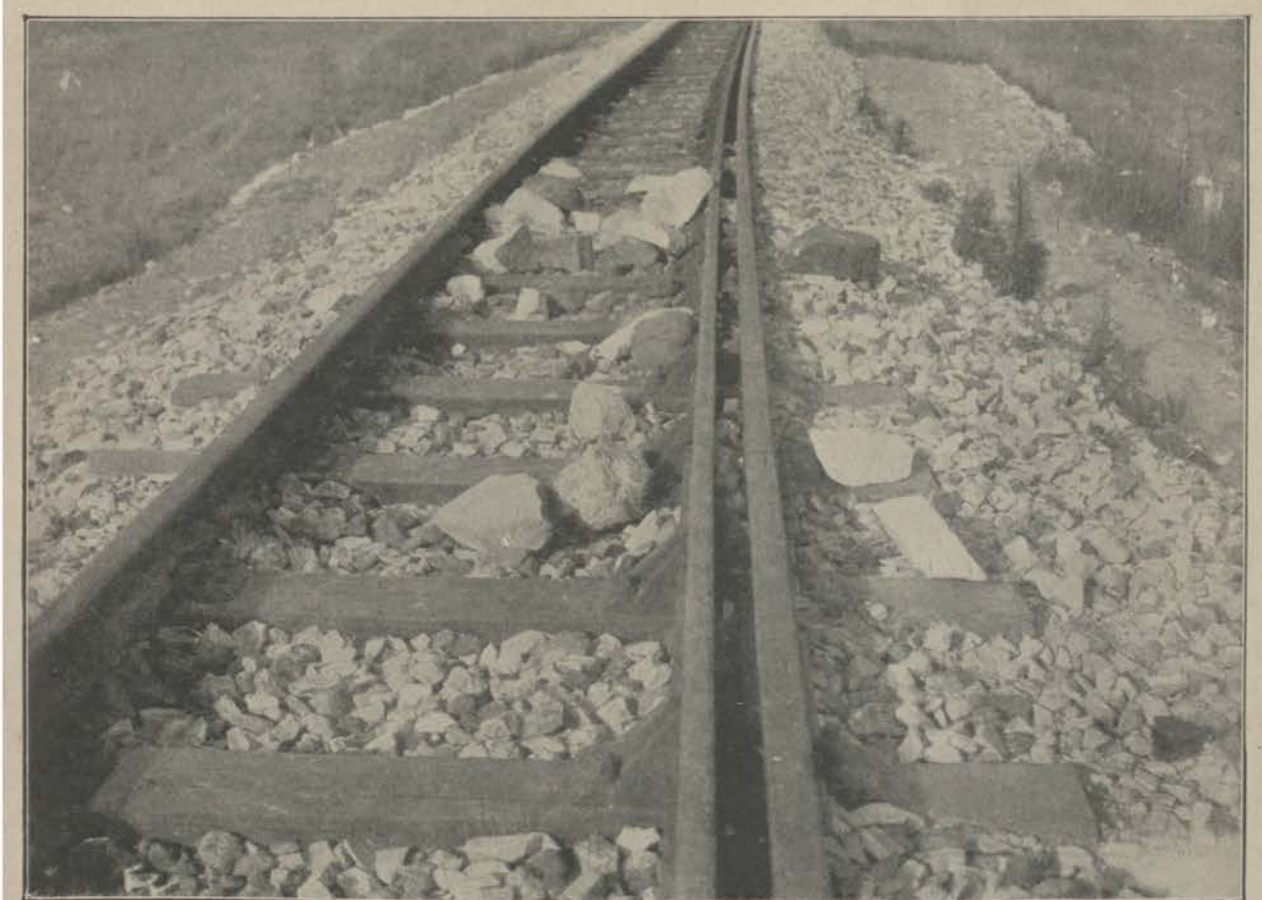
section of the Dublins, a company of Durban Light Infantry, and a civilian breakdown gang of seven men; lastly, an ordinary truck with tools and materials for repairing the line. The total force was about 120 men and one gun under the command of Captain Haldane, D.S.O., of the Gordons, then attached to the Dublins.

The usual precautions were observed, and in about an hour Frere station, the highest point between Estcourt and Colenso, was reached. All seeming quiet, Captain Haldane pushed on to Chieveley. Just as the train entered the station, Mr. Winston Churchill, who accompanied it, noticed about a hundred Boers cantering southwards about a mile from the railway; others were visible along the hills to the northwards. A telegraphic report was made, and Colonel Long ordered the train to return to Frere, and to remain there in observation during the day. Haldane obeyed, and the train was within one and three-quarter miles of Frere, when, on rounding a corner, a hill within 600 yards of the line was seen to be occupied by the enemy. Not a shot was fired until the train had reached the point of the track nearest to the hill, when two large field guns and a Vickers-Maxim suddenly appeared on the ridge, and opened a heavy and startling cannonade. Under the quick rattle of bullets the driver turned on full steam and dashed through the shell fire. A few seconds later the two leading trucks (those containing the tools and the Durban Volunteers) bounded off the line, the first turning a somersault, the second jolting a few yards and then falling on its side. The third was wedged across the track, half on, half off the metals.

Having successfully brought the train to a full stop by means of stones and displaced rails, the Boers now proceeded to hammer the wreckage with every gun and rifle they could bring to bear. For a few minutes all was wild confusion. Then the men from the capsized trucks scrambled up, some of the Dublins jumped down from the still intact cars, the 7-pounder opened fire from the rear, and the infantrymen ran to what cover they could find.

It was at this moment that Mr. Churchill ran to the front of the train, saw what was going forward, and arranged with Haldane that he should endeavour to clear the line, while the latter should

keep down the enemy's gun with musketry. The little 7-pounder was already useless. Its barrel had been struck by a shell, its trunnion smashed, and the gun knocked clean out of its carriage. The stream of shells fell more and more thickly on the doomed train. While Churchill laboured at his task in front, four shells passed clean through the intact truck, though bursting too late to damage the occupants. Many others burst against the front wall, throwing the men on their backs



THE SPOT WHERE THE ARMOURED TRAIN LEFT THE RAILS

with the concussion. But the fire of the Dublins never ceased, and the volunteers, though sorely tried, lay in the gutters along the track, and proved their right to fight beside British infantry.

Meanwhile, Winston Churchill bent all his energies to clearing the line for the escape of the rear half of the train. Two of the three trucks in front of the engine were already out of the way, but the third was only half derailed, and it was coupled to the second. With

considerable difficulty it was flung to the side by a gallant party of volunteers, and escape seemed certain, when it was discovered that the corner of the footplate of the engine would not pass that of the newly overturned truck. Further delay followed. Again and again the engine pushed forward against the obstruction, which each time yielded slightly but finally became jammed with the second truck, and had to be dragged clear by means of a fresh link added to the coupling chains. Still, however, the obstructing edge of the truck jutted across the line, and further delay followed. Finally, after seventy minutes of this nerve-shaking work, the engine driver put on more steam, and crashed through the obstruction. Once again, however, the fruits of long and courageous efforts were denied. The coupling behind the engine had parted, and the trucks occupied by the Dublins were now separated from it, and on the wrong side of the impediment. No one dared to bring the locomotive back for fear that it should again become imprisoned, and a fruitless effort was made to drag the trucks up to it. But the enemy's fire paralysed further effort. The engine driver had been half stunned by a shell, the engine itself had been struck several times, the wood-work of the fire-box was in flames, the feed injector had been broken, the tender had been pierced, the water was pouring from the battered framework. It only remained to get the wounded on board and to retreat while the boiler was still uninjured. Haldane resolved to withdraw slowly to some houses near Frere, and there, with what men he could collect, to hold out while the engine went for assistance.

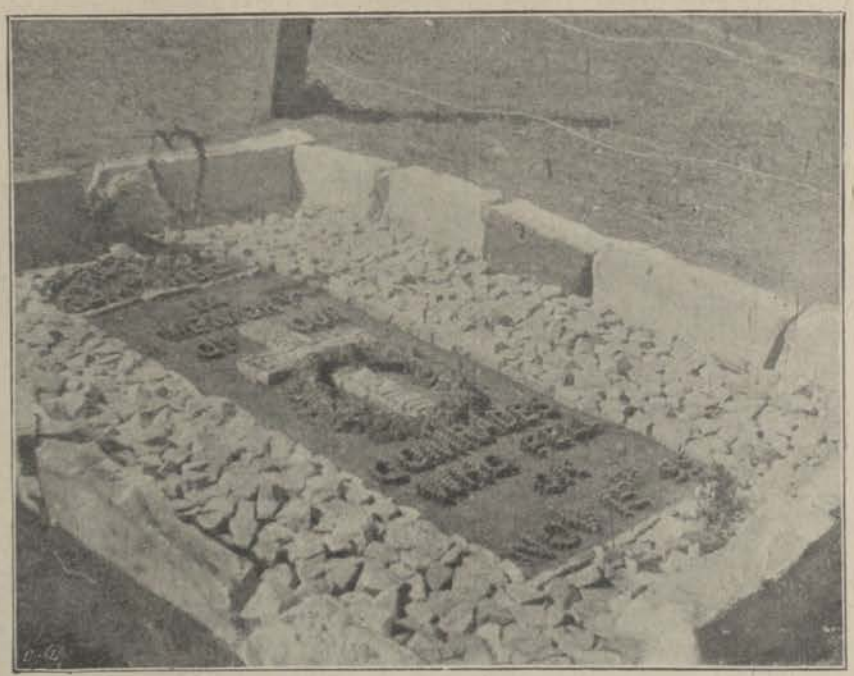
But the task was now an impossible one. The men, running by the engine, soon began to suffer from the increased fire of the Boer artillery, the disordered crowd tailed off along the track, the engine increased its pace and ran into safety, and when some dozen Boers bodily galloped down upon the exhausted soldiers and called on them to surrender, most of them, isolated and bewildered, complied, and the rest was shot or hunted down. A white flag, hoisted by a wounded private, no doubt partially accounted for their collapse, but order, cohesion, and discipline had been lost with the final retirement of the engine. Churchill and Haldane, striving to rally the men, were

THE DISASTER TO THE ARMOURED TRAIN

(From a description by Mr. Winston S. Churchill)

captured, about twenty were killed and wounded, and sixty-three were taken prisoners. A miserable remnant, not forty in all, returned to Estcourt. [1]

For a second time in the war was proved the helplessness of the armoured train when unsupported on the flanks and unprotected in the rear. As an aid to scouting it is, before an intelligent enemy, worse than useless. A scout should be mobile, silent, invisible. The train fulfils no single one of these essentials. It may, in the future, be useful on the battle-field, for it is a rapid means of advancing



THE GRAVE OF THOSE KILLED IN THE ARMOURED TRAIN DISASTER

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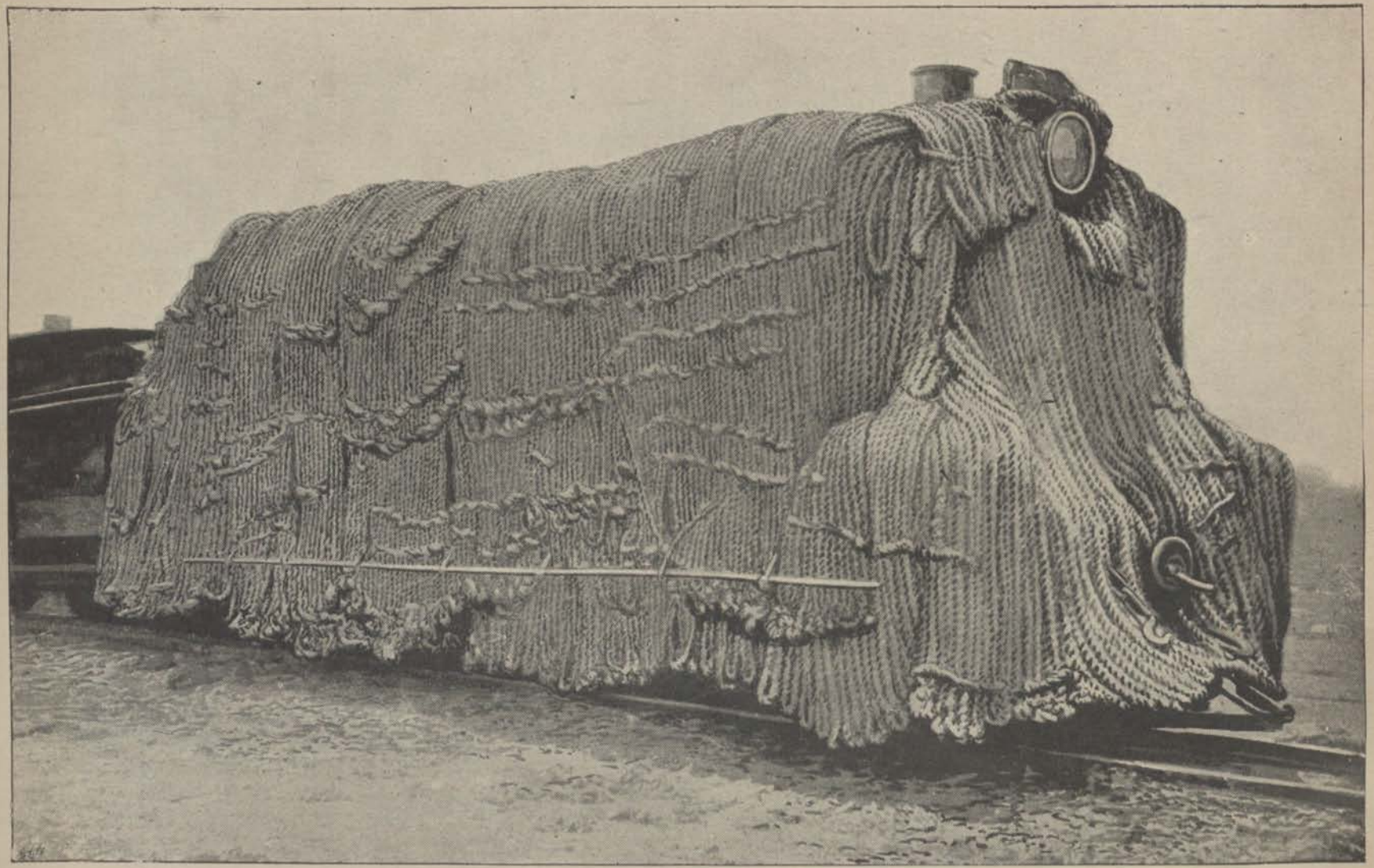
and retiring guns, and at the same time of providing protection against all but the heaviest ordnance. But used as it was beyond Frere and at Kraipan, it runs so great a risk that only the most pressing need can justify its employment.

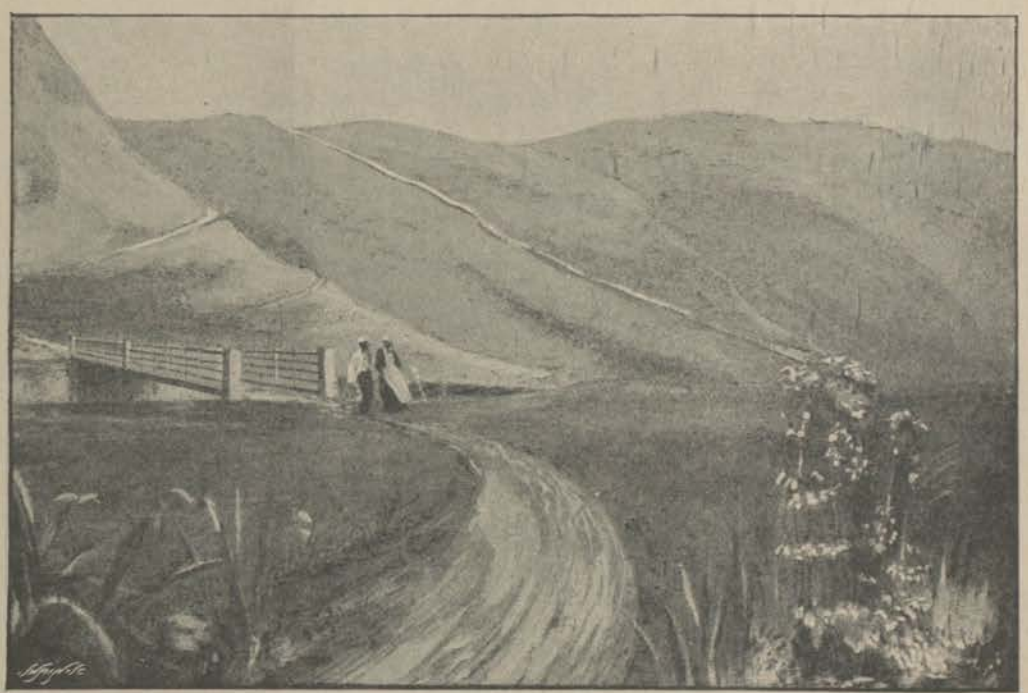
Despite the obvious necessity of quickly defeating the force at Estcourt, the Boers moved most leisurely. Not till Saturday, November

[1] We have almost implicitly followed Mr. Churchill's own account of the disaster, which is admirably clear and graphic, and which we recommend to those who are anxious for further details.



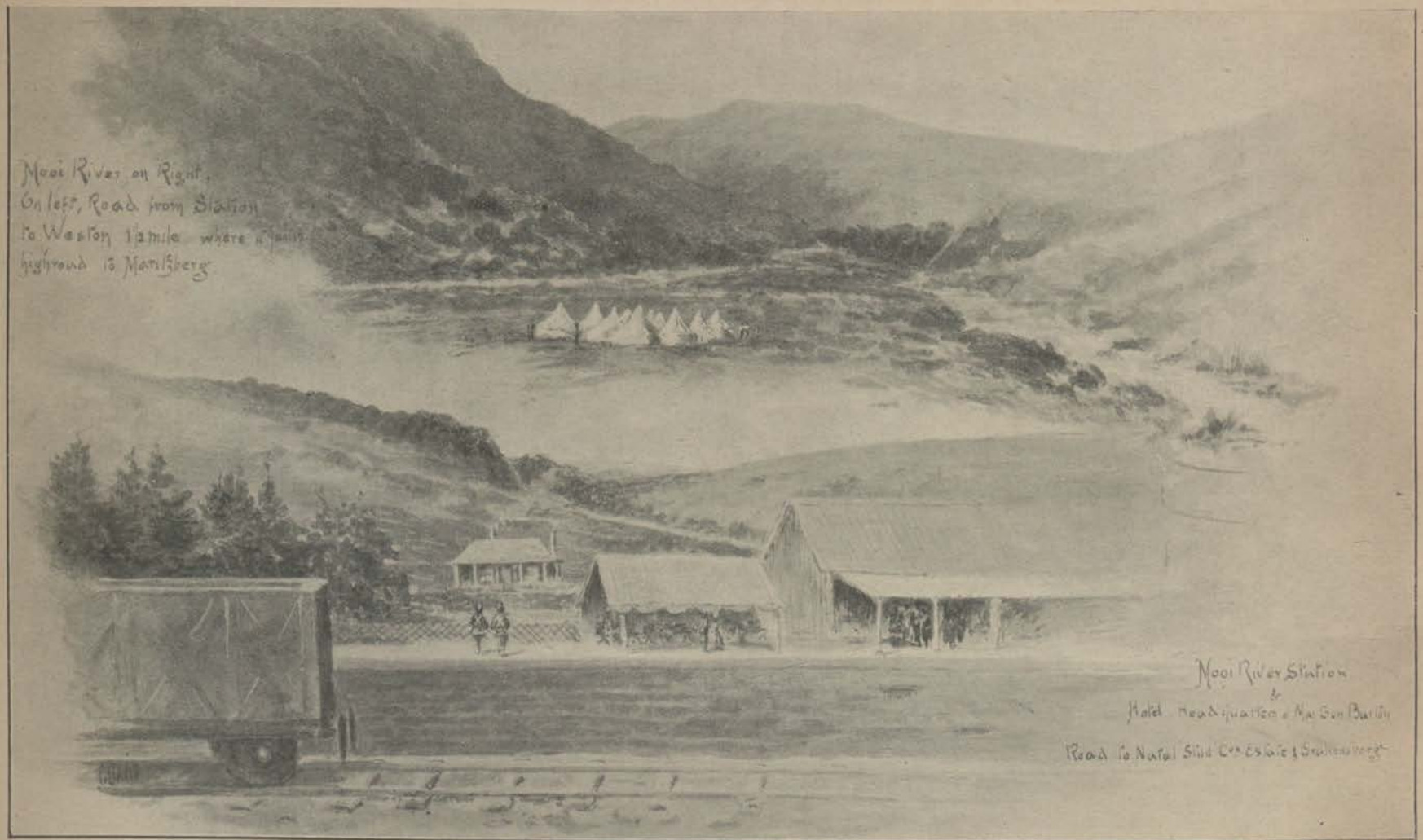
A PROTECTED ARMOURED TRAIN

18th, did parties of the enemy show themselves in force to the east and north-east of the town, and though an attack seemed imminent, nothing happened save a slight skirmish, after which the invaders withdrew to the east and west. Only to the north-west did they come close to the British lines, and even here a few volleys at long range drove them off. They consisted of a Free State commando under Grobelaar, and a body of Transvaalers from Weenen. Next day the situation had developed, for Boers were reported towards Ulundi and Hlatikulu, fourteen miles west of Estcourt, and near Highlands ten



THE BRIDGE OVER THE LITTLE BUSHMAN'S RIVER

miles to the south. The West Yorkshire and the West Surrey Regiments, under Colonel Kitchener, fired a few shots at some raiders near Willow Grange. It was further stated that Joubert himself had gone thither, and the same evening Kitchener, at Hildyard's order, moved north and joined the main body. A Free State commando was now ineffectually cannonading Barton's position to the south of the Mooi River. It was clear that the enemy intended to isolate Estcourt. Doubt and despondency had prevailed in the town as it was feared that the General would retire southwards to avoid invest-


Mooi River on Right,
On left, Road from Station
to Weston 1/2 mile where a fine
highroad to Maritzberg
Mooi River Station
&
Natal Field Force Head quarters
Road to Natal Land Co's Estate & Smallwoodgt

SCENES ON THE MOOI RIVER, NATAL

ment, and great was the relief when it was known that, confident of early relief, he had decided to remain The sequel proved the justice of his judgment.

On the 21st of November matters were coming rapidly to a crisis. The mounted troops—some 700 in all—reconnoitred eastwards, and came in touch with a body of Boers occupying some strong ridges five miles east of Willow Grange. The same afternoon the infantry were called out to meet a commando descending from the west of the station, which got within half a mile of the advanced piquets before it

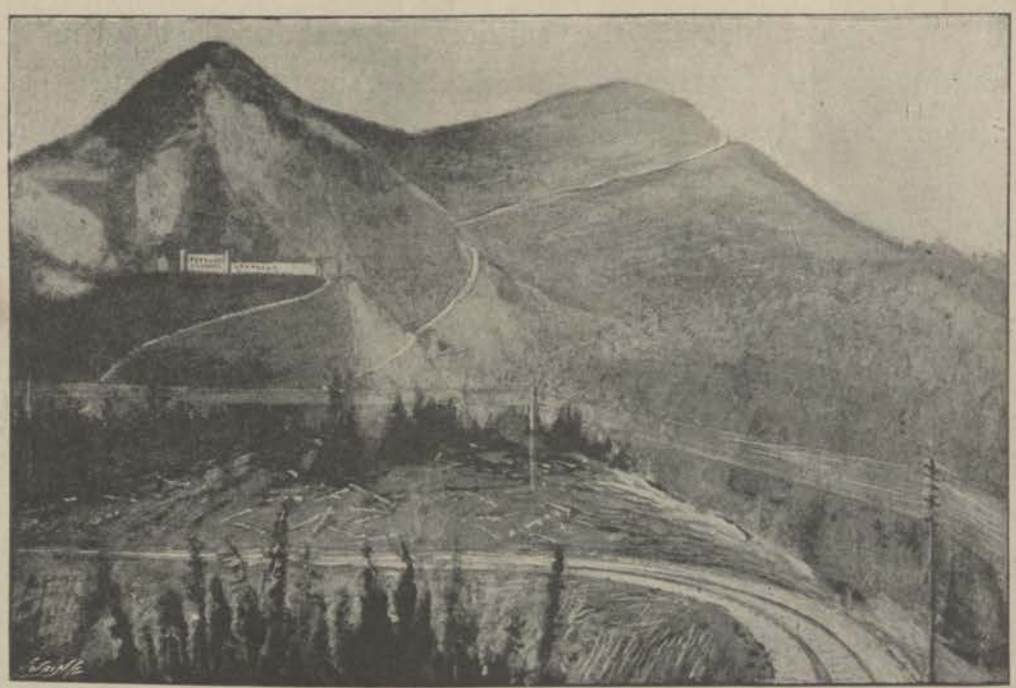
PREPARING FOR THE BOERS: A MUSTER OF THE TOWN GUARD AT PIETERMARITZBURG

was discovered. But the Boers made no attempt to attack, though the opportunity was a good one, and the British cavalry returning in the nick of time, the flanks of the ridge on which they were posted were turned, and the whole fell back upon the strong position of Brummerda,[1] which consisted of the end of a high roof-gabled ridge running south-west, the part occupied by the enemy being about six miles south of Estcourt. During the night the whole of the troops engaged returned thither, thus leaving the railway entirely exposed. The enemy took

[1] Called in one account Brynbella.

advantage of this to pull up the line and cut the wires. General Hildyard was, in a sense, isolated, but with a force consisting of five battalions, two naval 12-pounders, a 7-pounder battery, the 7th Battery R.A., and the mounted contingents, he still held strong cards. He resolved, before the semi-investment could be drawn tighter, to seek out the Boers at Brummerda, drive them from their position, and, if possible, take their guns.

On the afternoon of the 22nd the troops destined to take part in the attack left Estcourt. Preceded by the mounted scouts the whole



ON THE MARITZBURG RAILWAY NEAR ESTCOURT

advanced on a broad front: half a battalion of the 2nd Queen's (West Surrey) on the left, seven companies of the East Surrey in the centre, the 2nd West Yorkshire on the right. The left occupied the lower ridges overlooking Willow Grange railway station. The rest bivouacked on the lower slopes of Beacon Hill, or the Mountain of the Mist—a high, conical peak, half-way between the point of attack and Estcourt. Amid a tremendous thunderstorm the Naval Detachment dragged their 12-pounder to the summit, the Boers, some three miles away, firing leisurely into the advancing troops. Having reached the top Lieutenant

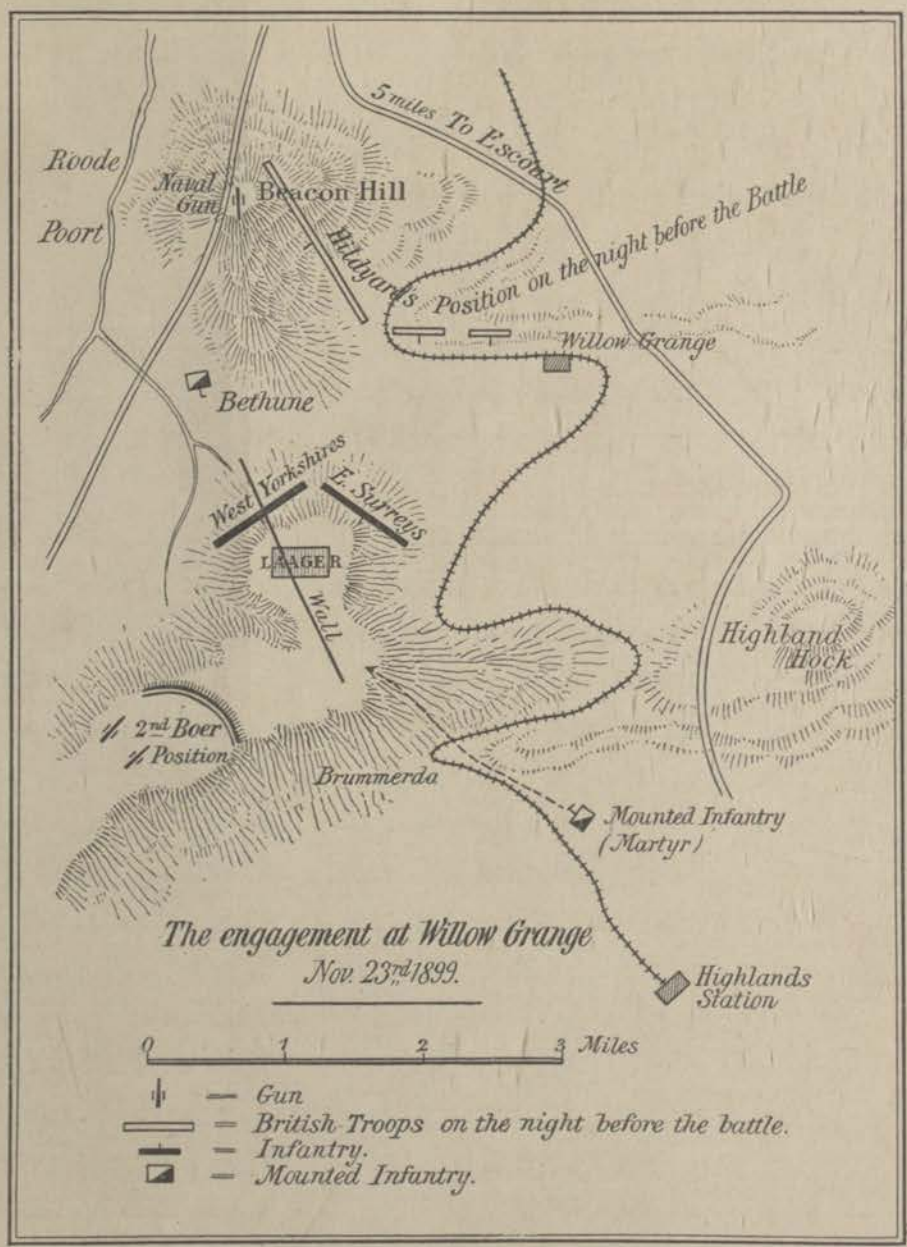
James, R.N., fired three shells, and the enemy's gun became silent. No doubt the object of the cannonade had been partly to draw our fire. Meanwhile the storm raged with fearful violence. It was one of the heaviest known in Natal for forty years, and the men lying out on the rocks were exposed to its full force. Rain fell in sheets, and the hail-stones were so hard and heavy that they bruised men's hands and faces and nearly stampeded the horses. The troops had marched out with little food in their haversacks, and with the lightest possible kits; and the cold and damp broke down the stoicism of many. "Men groaned aloud in their misery." It was no fit preparation for a night attack, and the after conduct of the soldiers is enhanced by the pitiable condition in which they began the day. About 2 a.m. they started: the Yorkshires to the right, East Surreys on the left; Colonel Martyr, with a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, a company of mounted Infantry belonging to the Rifles, and other contingents of Colonial Horse, was ordered to reconnoitre towards Willow Grange and Highlands; Colonel Bethune, and his own Mounted Infantry Regiment, to cover Kitchener's right flank. The 7th Battery R.A. was to support the movement, the Border Regiment being in reserve.

Side by side in the darkness the leading battalions struggled gallantly forward, and, despite the difficult nature of the ground, the Yorkshires reached the western base of the position by 3.30 a.m. Guided in part by a wall, which ran right over the crest, they worked their way up, and reached the sky-line with the first glimmer of dawn. The East Surreys, on the opposite flank, appear to have mistaken them for Boers in the semi-darkness, and a volley was sent in their direction, hitting several. At the same moment, with fixed bayonets and loud cheers, both corps dashed at the ridge. Some of the right-hand sections of the Surreys, losing direction, ran into those of the Yorkshires, and a momentary confusion, in which several men were wounded by bayonet or rifle, was the result. Fortunately both parties kept their heads, the mistake—a frequent one in night attacks—was rectified, and the men gained the summit, which they found untenanted. One Boer sentry was shot dead, the rest—about 150 in number—fled. The whole force of the enemy was now concentrated about 2,000 yards in rear,

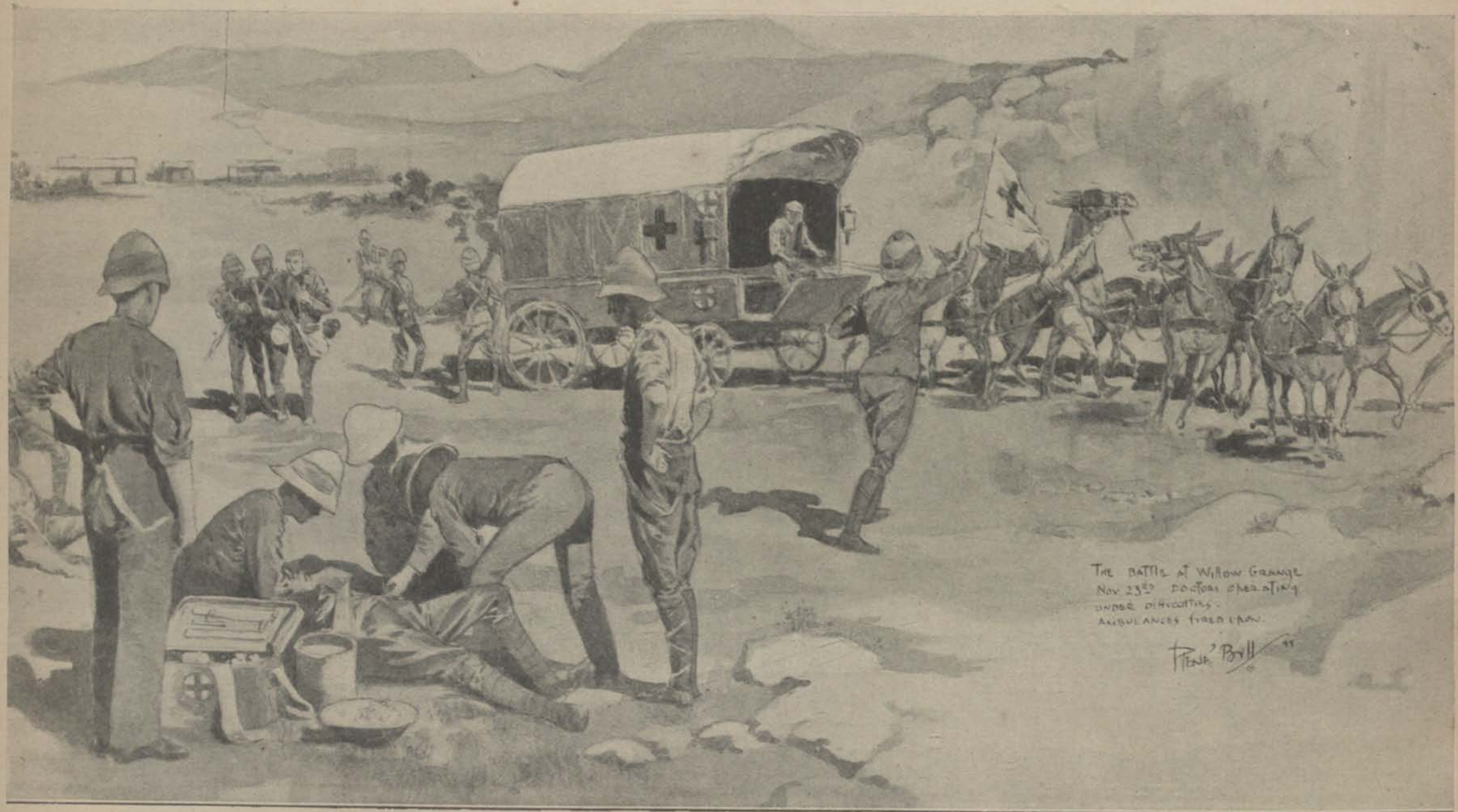
THE BATTLE OF ESTCOURT
ON THE EVENING OF THE 23RD
NOV. OUR TROOPS ADVANCED AGAINST
THE ENEMY DURING A HEAVY
THUNDER STORM. THE HEAVY RAIN
HAD SWOLLEN UP THE RIVERS BY
THE OPEN OF WHICH WAS FREQUENTLY
SEEN WHITE FALLING INTO RIVER FROM

THE BATTLE OF WILLOW GRANGE

their guns having been withdrawn less than two hours before. The Boers had probably foreseen our intentions, and they had now brought off a favourite manœuvre—that of luring their opponents to attack a first position, which is relinquished in time to occupy another which



dominates it. The assailants are left either to attack the second, or to hold the first under the enemy's fire, or to retire—all three costly and difficult operations. In the assault the British infantry had suffered about ten casualties, mostly self-inflicted; in the withdrawal—which



THE BATTLE OF WILLOW GRANGE. DOCTORS OPERATING UNDER DIFFICULTIES

General Hildyard, unwilling to divide his force and risk the loss of Estcourt, now ordered—some seventy were killed and wounded, and seven were taken prisoners.

It was about 6 a.m. when the East Surreys fell back from Brummerda, and, under cover of the naval gun and the fire of the Yorkshires along the summit wall, retired in excellent order across the flat to the low ridge which ran from Beacon Hill towards the conquered position. The Boer rifle and gun fire was extremely heavy, but the East Surreys were soon out of range of the former, and few of the shells burst effectively. The retirement of the Yorkshires was far more difficult. A Vickers-Maxim was raining 3-lb. shell upon the wall and the level crest behind it, the ground on both sides being strewn with lead and splinters. Long lines of Boer riflemen now began to advance, some creeping round upon the flank and enfilading the line of the defence. So virulent did the fire become that when Colonel Kitchener withdrew his last battalion, General Hildyard sent forward Colonel Martyr with his mounted force to bring off the wounded and cover the retreat. With fine dash the Imperial Light Horse rode in, dismounted, and reached the wall, exchanging a heavy fusillade with the enemy's skirmishers, who were cautiously descending the slopes of their new position, and crawling on amongst the iron-stone boulders with which the hills of Natal are strewn. But before the resolute front of Colonel Martyr's men they failed as usual to drive the attack home, and after performing a deed of great coolness and gallantry the horsemen fell back pursued beyond Beacon Hill by the far-ranging Creusot shells. Only a detachment of eight men, including Major Hobbs, were taken prisoners. The West Yorkshires had lost altogether sixty-eight men out of a total of eighty-seven. Not the least regretable loss was that of Chapman, whose excellent guiding, in General Hildyard's words, "alone made it possible to carry out the operation."

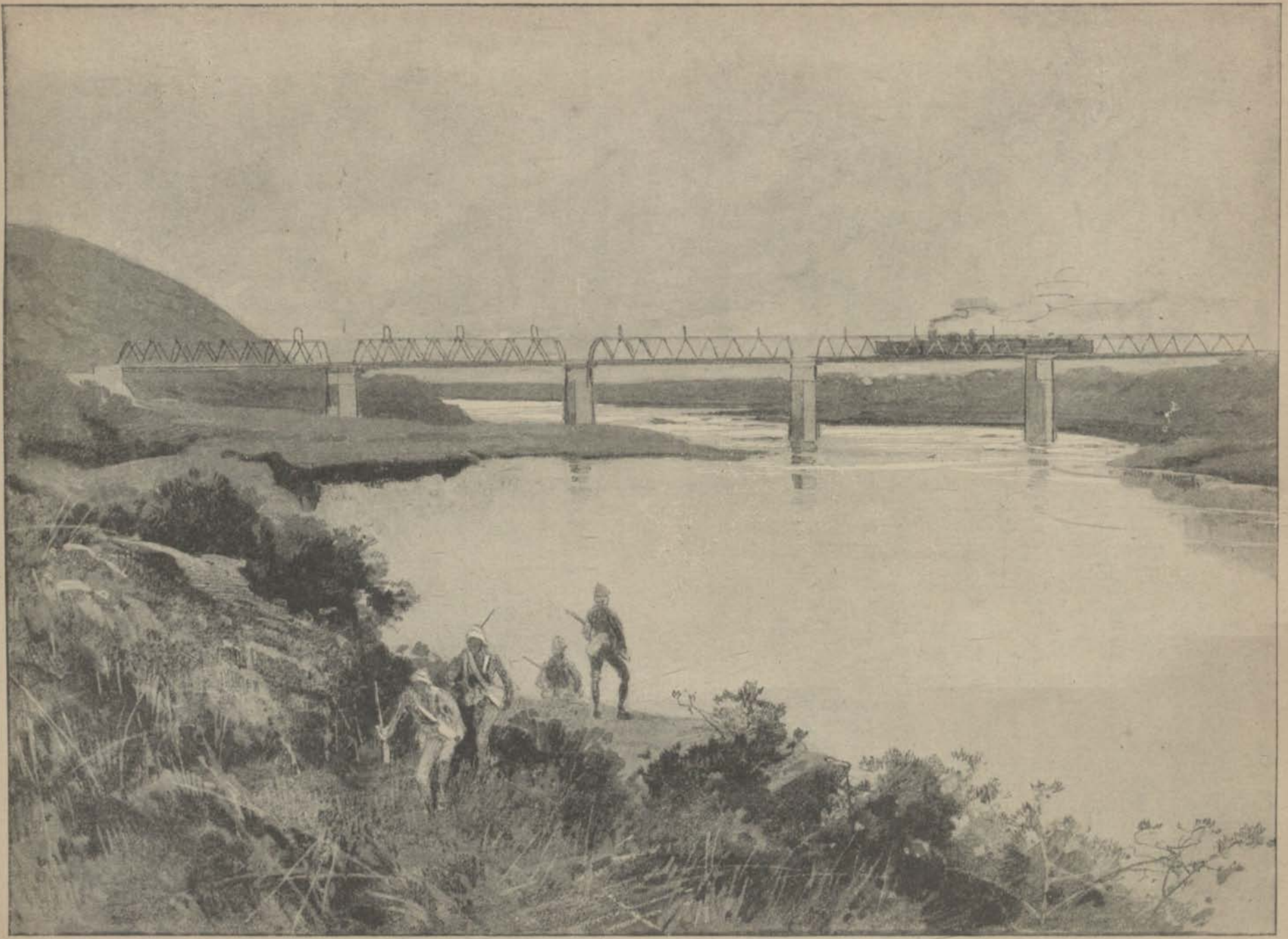
The action of Willow Grange showed clearly the superiority of the Creusot field-piece over our naval gun of the same calibre. Our field artillery battery never got into action at all during the engagement, and the enemy's cannon, using smokeless powder, were exceedingly difficult to locate. The spoils of the victory, if victory it may be called,

THE BOERS BLOWING UP A BRIDGE

were thirty horses and the remains of the Boer laager. The fight was the almost last instance of a night assault to which we shall have to refer. The other three actions that come under the same category are Belmont, Magersfontein, and Stormberg. The first of these, considered as a night-attack, cannot be called a success; the two last were disasters. The whole series, fairly reviewed, are not likely to create a desire for imitation in the minds of future generals.

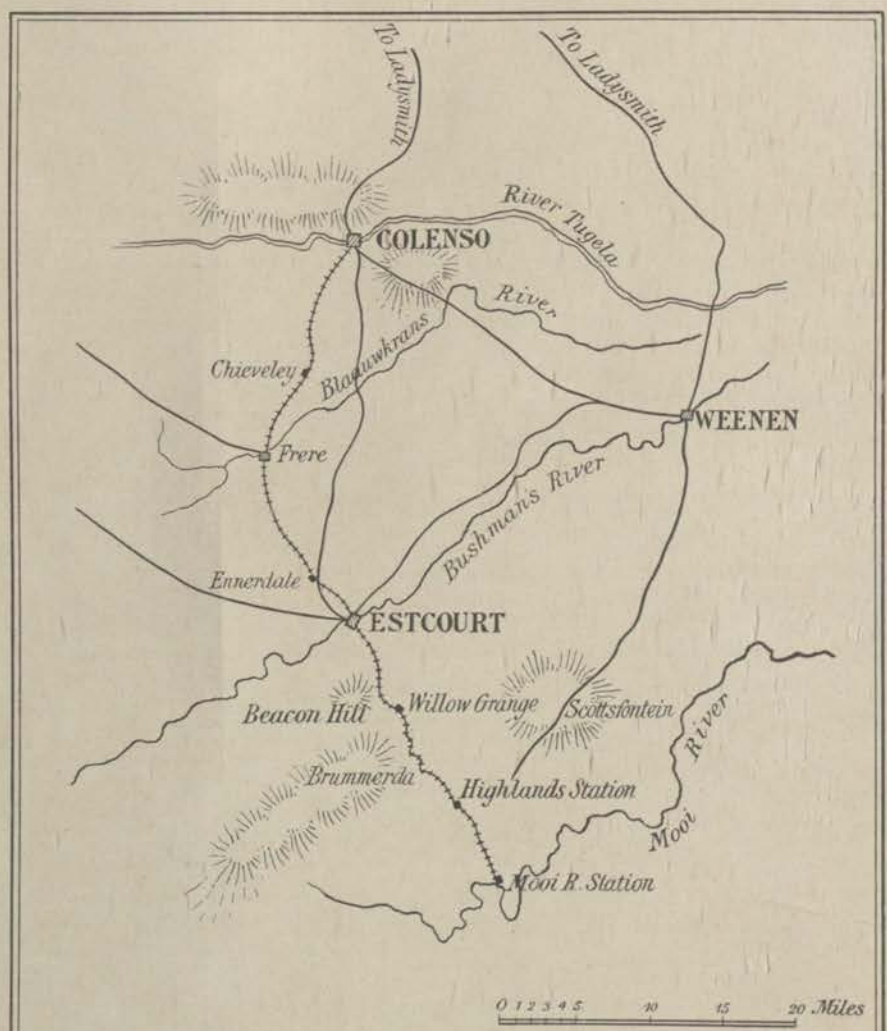
The Boer losses were small, though probably greater than our own. One Boer doctor put the total at 100 wounded and thirty killed, and about the latter number of graves were afterwards discovered. The damage must have almost entirely been inflicted by rifle fire, for the shells of the naval gun, fired at an almost invisible enemy, are not likely to have been very deadly, and the only opportunity for using the bayonet was in the assault which all but three or four of the enemy escaped by a timely flight. In any case General Buller's estimate of the value of the success achieved appears exaggerated. That an enemy whose last movement on the field was one rather of advance than retreat, and whose artillery was never silenced, should have been so demoralised that it recrossed the Tugela "in a manner that was more of a rout than a retreat," seems rather hard to believe. General Joubert's force could not have been severely handled, for it was never attacked. The natural reason for the Boers' return to Colenso was Clery's advance, and, as was shown by intercepted telegrams, the initial successes of Methuen, near Kimberley. The disorder was due probably to the precipitate nature of the retreat and to the exhaustion of his animals, which, despite the provender of Southern Natal, had suffered from heavy and constant work.

The rivers, too, were full and further disordered and fatigued the retreating column. No doubt a strong cavalry force would have easily cut Joubert off, for by retreating first to Weenan and then doubling back on Colenso the Boer general was moving round the arcs of a circle to a point, *i.e.*, Colenso, which could have been reached by the British troops at Estcourt by a march of half the distance. But Hildyard and Barton had not 1,000 mounted men between them, and none of the latter's troops were at Estcourt when the Boer retirement began. On



THE RAILWAY BRIDGE AT COLENSO

Saturday, November 24th, the various commandos met at Highlands and rode in different directions. The Free Staters, several hundreds of whom were without horses, disappeared in the Ulundi direction, sending the cattle they had seized over the Drakensberg. Joubert moved



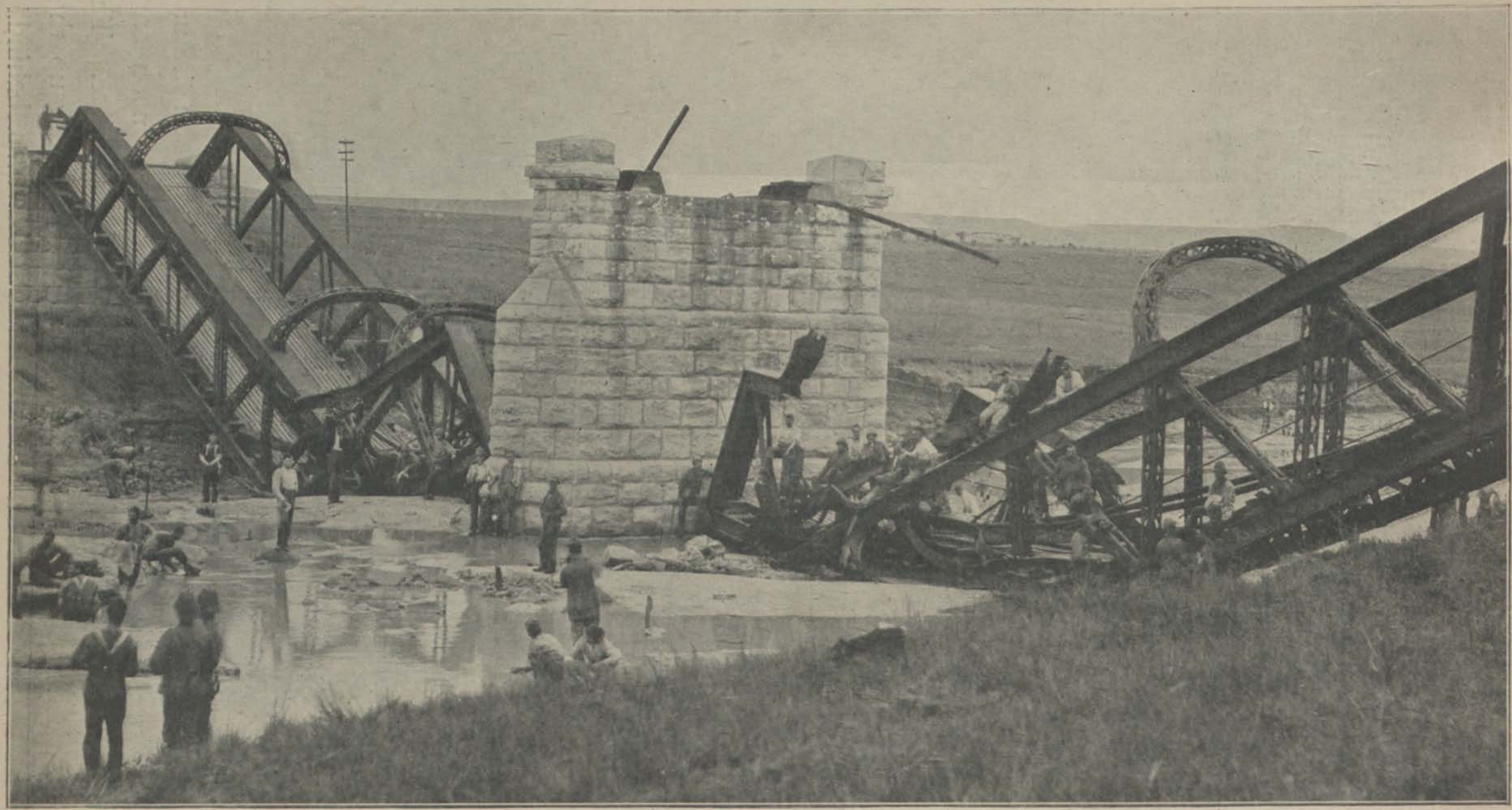
A sketch to illustrate Joubert's invasion of S. Natal and his subsequent retreat.

during the night and crossed over the Scottsfontein ridges about 10 miles from Highlands early on Saturday. From 8.0 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. long lines of waggons streamed down the hills, and during the afternoon a strong rearguard remained in position east and west of the Weenan road, falling back towards evening. The loyal colonist who

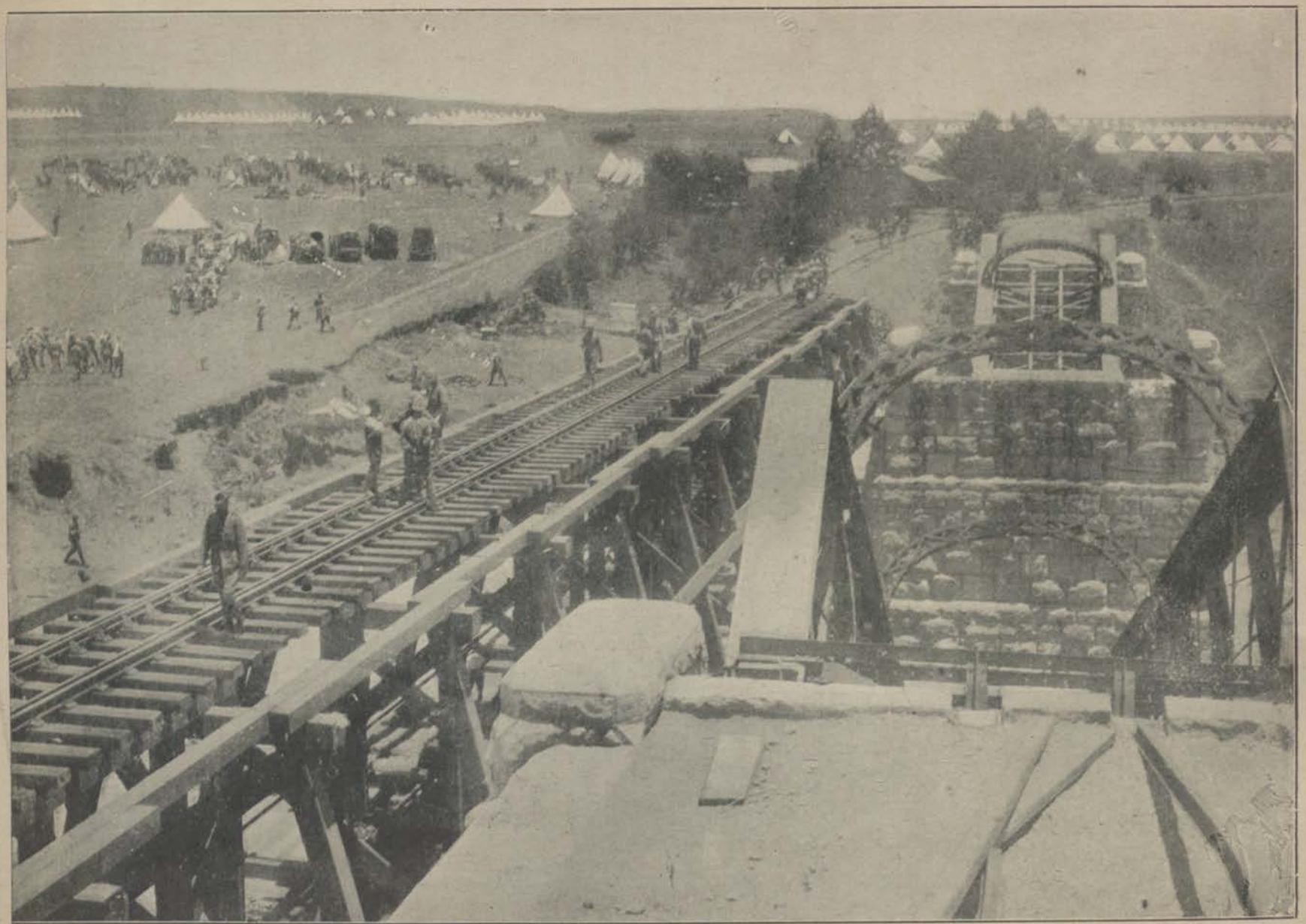
describes this scene sent off a messenger to Highlands early on Saturday morning as soon as he had received the news of the Boer night-march. The boy, having with difficulty evaded the suspicions of the enemy, reached Highlands Station about 14 miles away, met two English scouts, and was taken by them to an officer to whom he gave his message. On receiving the intelligence Barton sent Thorneycroft's

A TRENCH AT CHIEVELEY CAMP

Horse, the Fusilier Brigade, and the 2nd Devons to Estcourt, which they reached, after a hard march of twenty-two miles, early on Sunday afternoon. Hildyard, who appears to have known on Saturday that the Boers were retreating, set his force in motion at noon on Sunday, and reached Frere the same day. But it was now too late. That night Joubert crossed the Tugela by a drift near Colenso, blew up the railway bridge, and stood ready for defence upon the hills behind. Three



THE RAILWAY BRIDGE AT FRERE BLOWN UP BY THE BOERS



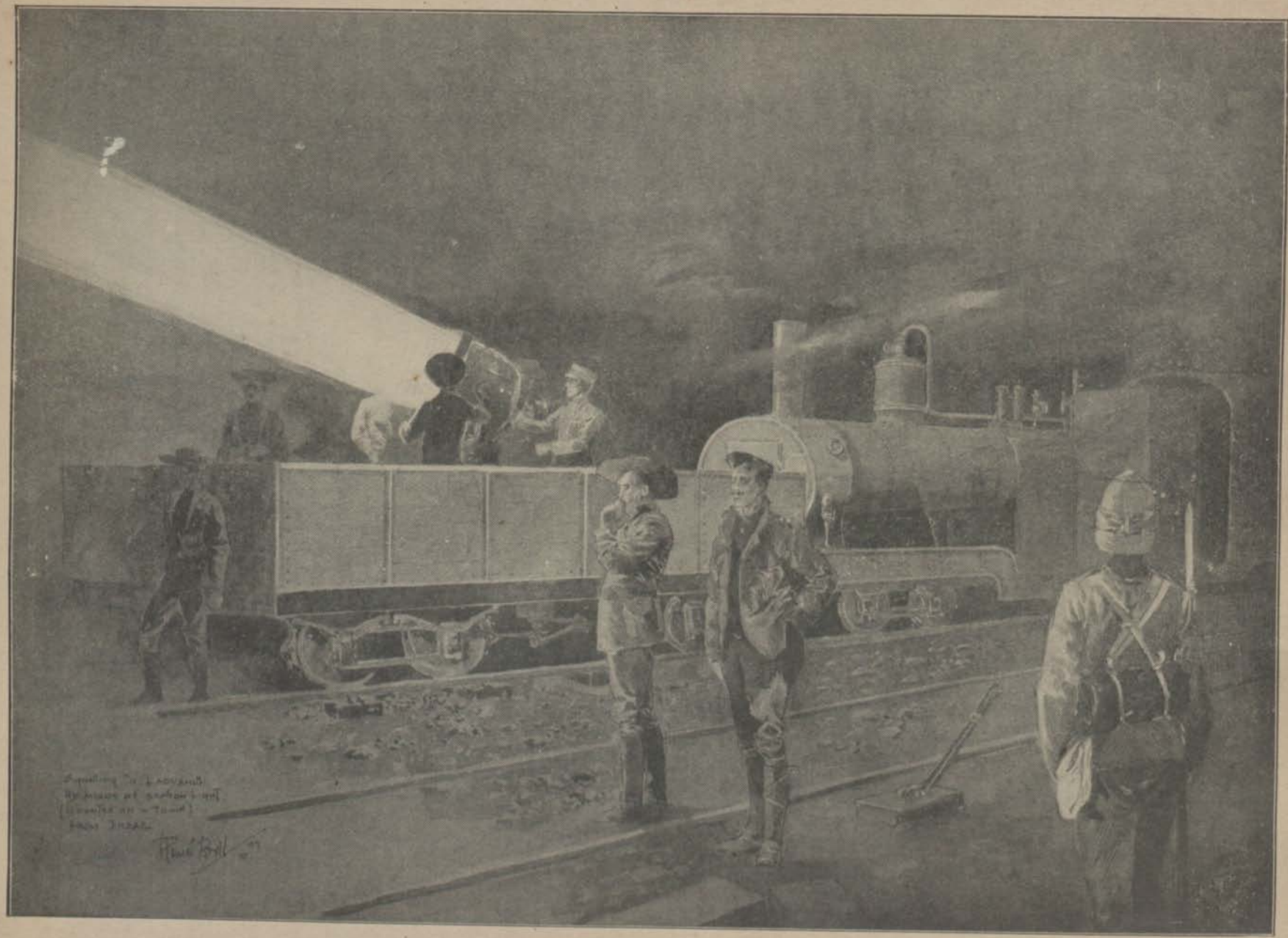
THE NEW RAILWAY BRIDGE AT FRERE

weeks from its commencement the Boer invasion of Southern Natal was over, but it left behind memories of wanton destruction which will not easily be forgotten.

The Boers being for the moment out of reach, the brigadiers bent their energies on the conveyance of stores, the repair of railway and telegraph, and other matters connected with organisation. Sir Redvers Buller was now in Natal, and things went forward quickly. In the first week of December the four infantry brigades, viz., the Irish brigade under Hart, the Light Brigade under Lyttelton, the Fusilier Brigade under Barton, and Hildyard's English Brigade, were ready for work. The mounted infantry had been increased to a strength of 1,700 horses, and a brigade of regular cavalry had arrived, consisting of the Royal Dragoons and the 13th Hussars. The artillery included thirty field guns, twelve long naval 12-pounders from the H.M.S. *Tartar* and *Terrible*, and two 4·7 guns.

Thanks to the energy of the civil engineers the new trestle bridge over the Blankranz river at Frere was completed on December 5th; and the old bridge blown up by the Boers rapidly removed. A heliographic station was fixed on Umkolanda, a mountain thirty miles east of Frere, for communication with Ladysmith. During the period of expectation the Cavalry had made two reconnaissances in force towards Colenso, on November 28th and December 6th. On the first occasion Lord Dundonald's force was heavily fired on, and with wonderful luck escaped without a casualty; on the second, when the Commander-in-chief himself was present, not a Boer was to be seen, and not a gun or rifle was fired. Possibly the enemy was aware of the presence of the Staff and refrained from disclosing their positions.

By the 12th of December all was ready. The camp at Frere was abundantly supplied. The relief force, 22,000 strong, was about to advance. In England hopes ran high. Now, without doubt, the disasters of Stormberg and Magersfontein would be signally avenged. Men doubted if the Boers would fight on the Tugela, and so risk an assault from the Ladysmith garrison, as well as from Buller's divisions. To many, the best means of effecting this double attack appeared the only consideration worth discussion. That the Boers could maintain the investment and beat off the relieving army was scarcely thought possible.



SIGNALLING TO LADYSMITH FROM FRERE BY A SEARCHLIGHT MOUNTED ON A TRAIN

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF COLENSO

STRENGTH OF THE LINE OF THE TUGELA—SPECIAL ADVANTAGES OF THE BOERS—SHORTNESS OF THE ASSAILABLE FRONT—BULLER'S CHOICE OF COLENSO AS THE POINT OF ATTACK—DESCRIPTION OF THE BOER POSITION—EASTERN AND WESTERN SECTIONS—BOER DEFENCES—BULLER'S PLAN OF ATTACK—BOMBARDMENT ON DECEMBER 13TH AND 14TH—INFORMATION AS TO THE ENEMY'S POSITIONS—ORDERS FOR THE FORCE—THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 15TH—ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH—FATE OF THE IRISH BRIGADE—LYTTELTON MOVES FORWARD IN SUPPORT—HILDYARD'S ATTACK ON COLENSO—LONG'S ADVANCE—HIS BATTERIES CRUSHED BY SUPERIOR FIRE—RETIREMENT TO THE DONGA—ARRIVAL OF DETACHMENTS OF INFANTRY IN SUPPORT—ATTEMPTS TO SAVE THE GUNS—REID'S ATTEMPT—FIGHT ON HLANGWANE—THE SOUTH AFRICAN LIGHT HORSE—GENERAL ORDERS FOR A RETIREMENT—LONG'S MEN AND DEVONS SURROUNDED—FINAL WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH AND END OF THE BATTLE—LOSSES, BRITISH AND BOER—COMMENTS—BULLER'S PLAN CONSIDERED—DEFECTIVE INTELLIGENCE—WAS HART'S ALLOTTED SHARE OF THE ATTACK FEASIBLE?—PRECAUTIONS NEGLECTED—COULD HILDYARD HAVE GOT IN IF SUPPORTED BY THE ARTILLERY?—LONG—HIS ORDERS—THEORY OF CLOSE RANGE FOR ARTILLERY—WERE GROUND SCOUTS EMPLOYED?—COULD THE GUNS HAVE BEEN RETAKEN?—SUMMARY—COLENSO AS COMPARED WITH THE MODDER—FRESH EXERTIONS OF ENGLAND—LORD ROBERTS TO TAKE COMMAND IN SOUTH AFRICA.

THE line of the Tugela River which the Boers had resolved to defend was, under the then prevailing conditions, one of extraordinary strategical and tactical strength. A river is more or less traversable in proportion as its width, depth, length of course, points of passage and configuration of its banks, hamper or aid the assailant. The front open to assault may be so great that it is impossible to guard it adequately throughout, or, what is nearly the same thing, to muster sufficient troops at the threatened point in the necessary time. The difficulty of the operation may lie, as in the case of the Danube at Vienna, in the enormous width and depth of the stream, or in the positions which command the bridges and fords. It may be possible to drive the defendant on to his own bank, and so draw a complete veil between his scouts and the disposition of the attacking army. The formation of ground on the assailant's bank may enable him to bring to bear such a crushing superiority of fire that opposition to the passage is

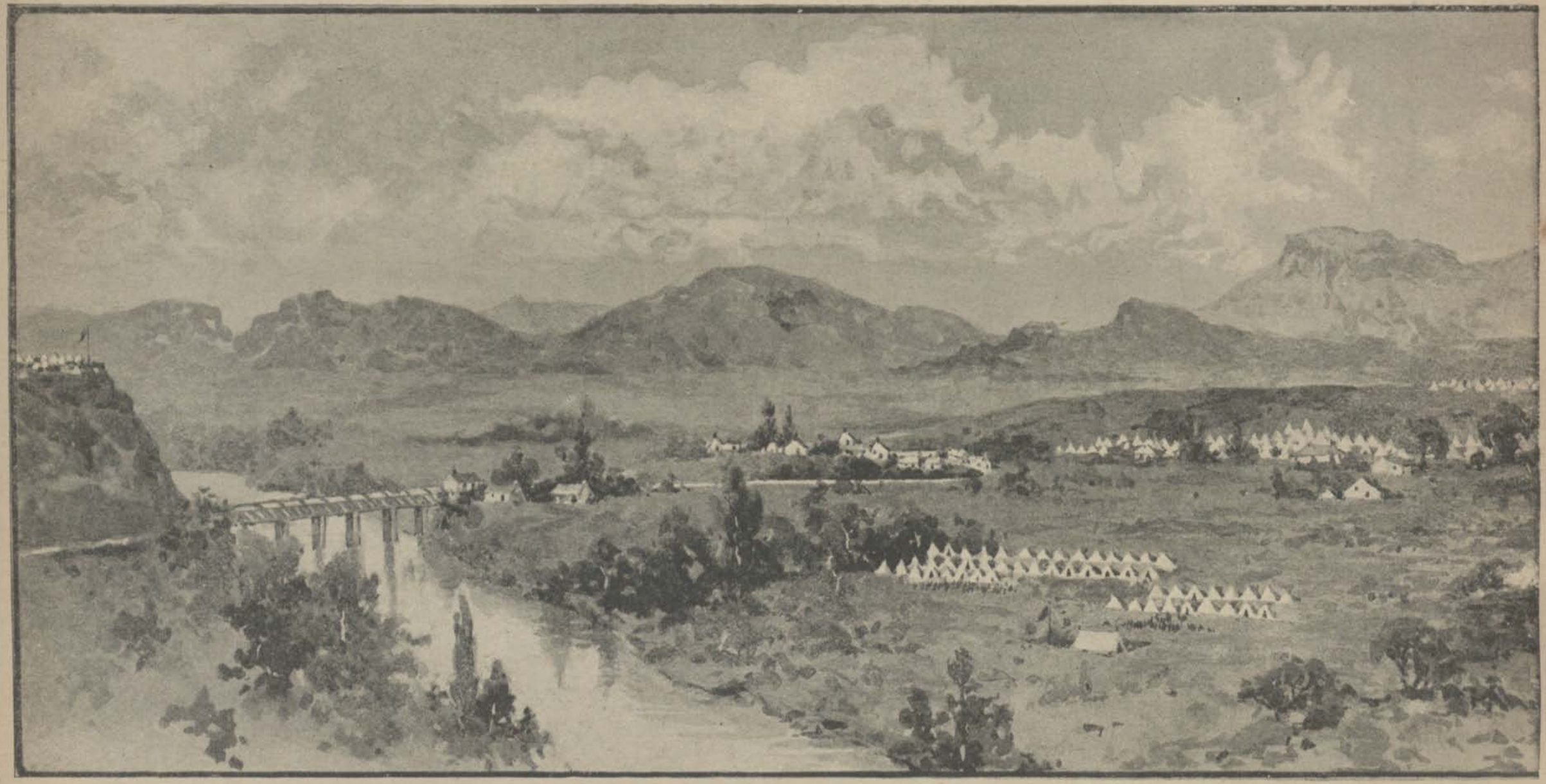
COLENSO AND THE HILLS ON THE NORTH OF THE TUGELA

out of the question. The country in which he may have to mass his troops may be well or badly roaded; the means of crossing plentiful or scarce. Now in the present case every one of these well-known but all-important factors were on the side of the Boers. In the first place, the length of frontage, measuring from above Potgieter's Drift to the point where the Weenen road crosses the stream, is only about forty miles, a distance greatly shortened by field telegraphy, and enabling the enemy, thanks to their great mobility, to concentrate at one or other of its extremities within one or two days. A few miles west of Zwart's Kop the mountain masses of the Drakensberg, an almost roadless and sparsely inhabited country, made a turning movement, essentially a rapid operation, impossible. The barren hilly region east of Weenen made attack equally fruitless. Therefore at some point within these forty to fifty miles General Buller had to strike his blow and forestall the enemy. Modern tactical conditions, which have so greatly increased the resisting power of a small force, further discounted the primary advantages conferred by the possession of the initiative. In other words, a sudden dash was less likely than formerly to be the precursor of rapid and overwhelming success. The routes leading to the river bank may for the present purposes be reckoned as three—the main road to Colenso, that on the west by Zwart's Kop, and that on the east by Weenen. This paucity of good roads was also calculated greatly to hamper the advance of heavy columns. The river itself, pouring down from the precipitous passes of the Drakensberg, flows along a line of rugged hills of great extent, complexity, and height, those on the north almost invariably dominating those on the southern bank. The bridges, except the road bridge at Colenso which was purposely left intact, being broken, the stream was only passable at a few dangerous drifts, liable to be rendered useless by the sudden floods. The average width was about 100 yards. The Boers were better supplied with maps and information, and a large part of the population was favourable to them. The passage of a river is a question of speed, yet in every quality and condition that makes for swiftness, we were severely handicapped. In view of the subsequent operations it is only just to General Buller to remember the difficulties of the task which lay before him.

THE VALLEY OF THE TUGELA

The English General, advancing northwards after Joubert's escape, knew that the Boers had withdrawn to the hills above Colenso, and were preparing to oppose his advance. The first of Dundonald's reconnaissances had drawn a heavy fire; the second, personally conducted by himself, revealed nothing. Generally the impression appears to have been that the enemy were holding an extensive line north of the river, their main bodies within easy distance of Colenso. So far Sir Redvers had in no way shown his hand. He had sent patrols to his right and left as well as front, and the bulk of his troops were still far enough away, *i.e.*, round Estcourt and Frere, to enable him to move secretly upon Springfield or Weenen, operations culminating either in a flanking march by Acton Homes, or a passage of the Tugela north of Weenen, or an attack from the eastward on the Hlangwane group of hills, which was the only position still held by the Boers on the southern bank, and completely commanded the kopjes at Colenso. These alternatives were, however, discarded. Either because he considered his transport was not equal to a fast march away from the railway, or because he believed that no easier point could be found elsewhere, and preferred to fight in a position which covered his communications to the south, General Buller resolved to go to Colenso and there deliver his attack.

The Boer position was perhaps better adapted for defence than any other on the line of the Tugela. It was divided into an eastern and western half, the latter portion stretching six to seven miles along the northern bank of the river, the former lying south of the stream on the high and extensive massif of Hlangwane and Inhlawe. These two halves must be treated separately. The Hlangwane section, which formed the real key to the whole line, fills the great northern bend of the river after it reaches the Fort Wylie Hill. From the Boer point of view it was absolutely essential to hold it, for as the sequel proved its seizure by a hostile force rendered the other half of the position absolutely untenable. This long and rugged ridge had therefore been strongly occupied, and two or three guns and a corps of specially picked shots had been detailed for its defence. The arrival of the necessary reinforcements of men and stores was ensured by means of a bridge



COLENSO

and drifts. In spite of these precautions, however, it remained the weak point of the Boer lines, a fact unfortunately not discovered till three fruitless attempts elsewhere and a previous loss of 3,000 men drove the British General to attack it as a last chance.

GENERAL SCHALK BURGER

The Colenso section, against which Sir Redvers had resolved to make his main effort, consisted firstly of the deep stream and high scrub-covered banks of the river. At the village itself and opposite Fort Wylie the enemy, as at the Modder, held the southern bank, concealed shelter trenches and rifle pits being dug wherever they were

THE 4·7-IN. NAVAL GUN IN ACTION AT COLENSO

LIBRARY OF THE ROYAL BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC

likely to prove useful. Further to the west the salient loop running up between Grobler's Kloof and Red Hill was flanked on both sides by trenches within easy rifle range. Further back numerous stone walls and earthworks encircled the base and sides of Red Hill and Grobler's Kloof. A series of small lozenge-shaped kopjes to the north of the broken railway bridge were elaborately defended, and the eastward flank rested on the hill on which Fort Wylie stood, its bushy sides scored by tier upon tier of trenches. The Boer artillery, consisting of from ten to twenty guns of various kinds, was generally placed at

A BOER LAAGER AT COLENSO

some distance behind the infantry lines, the heavy guns on the crests of the higher hills at ranges varying from one mile to three from the river, the smaller pieces, quick-firers, &c., upon the Fort Wylie kopjes, and between Grobler's Kloof and Red Hill. These lighter guns were moved several times during the action, and owing to their smokeless powder were exceedingly difficult to locate. The whole system of defence was arranged so as to bring the maximum weight of fire upon the only points at which a crossing could be effected, and the ranges were carefully marked on the plain to the south. The lofty heights and concealed positions on the northern bank completely commanded

A DRIFT ON THE RIVER NEAR CHIEVELEY

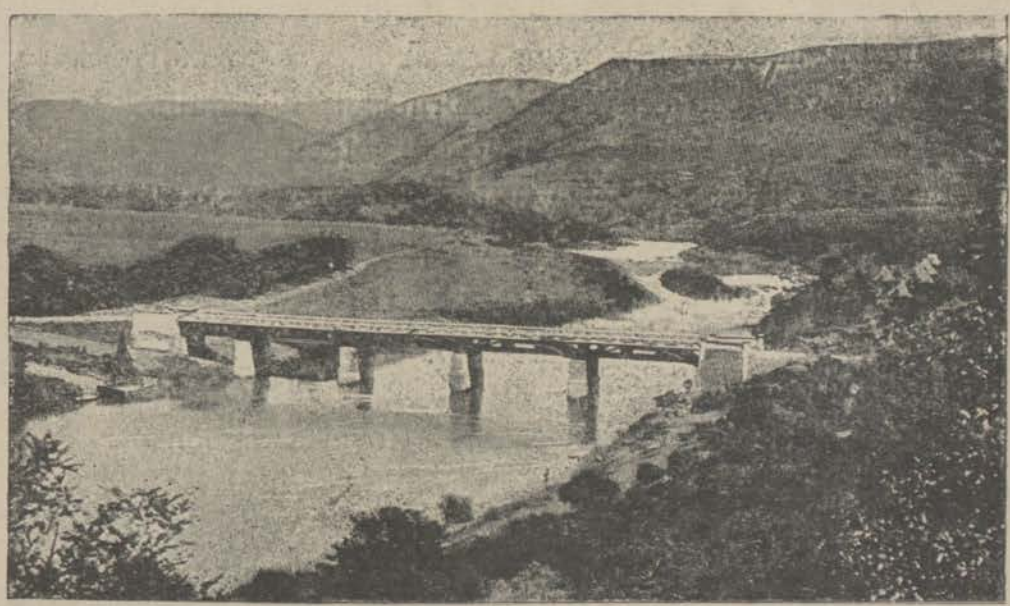
the whole of the treeless and open downs, which, sinking gently to the river, afforded no cover but ant-heaps.

A more awkward task than the forcing of this line has rarely presented itself to any commander. Sir Redvers Buller was not inclined to underestimate the difficulty. Like Lord Methuen at Magersfontein, he determined to try the effect of a heavy bombardment before sending in the infantry. Like him, too, he probably attached too much value to shell fire. Of inflicting a crushing defeat, however, he was not sanguine. He only hoped, to use his own words, that if "he could effect a lodgment under cover of Fort Wylie, the other hills would to a great extent mask each other, and shell fire and want of water would clear these out in time." In other words, his aim was to seize the first and lowest line of the Boer positions, trusting to further fighting to drive them from the higher ranges upon which their guns were placed.

The general features of the operation determined, the movement began on the morning of the 12th, General Barton, with two 4·7 guns and six naval 12-pounders, taking up a position within three miles of Colenso on a stony kopje just east of the railway. On the following day, beginning at 7.15 a.m., a furious bombardment was poured upon the Boer ridges. Every visible defence was heavily shelled, the lyddite tearing great gaps in the entrenchments and driving the Boers out. Many onlookers were seen collecting on the further heights, but in spite of six hours' cannonading the enemy refused to disclose his artillery positions by firing in reply. Still, it was clear that the trenches were strongly manned, and next day the naval guns advanced 1,000 yards nearer and repeated the performance. The result was the same, and the expenditure of ammunition, so far as the obtaining of information was concerned, was unavailing.

While the bombardment was in progress the whole of Buller's troops marched to Chieveley and encamped about a mile beyond that place, on the west of the railway. Late on the same evening the general orders for the attack were drawn up by General Sir F. Clery under the supervision of the Commander-in-chief. On the intelligence referred to in their first paragraph we must suppose these orders to have been based. General Buller knew that the enemy were entrenched in

the kopjes to the north of Colenso bridge. The presence of two large camps had been also reported, one on the Ladysmith road five miles north-west of Colenso, the other beyond Hlangwane Mountain on the northern bank of the Tugela. Without laying too much stress on the exact interpretation of this information, it is worth remarking that the entrenchments on Grobler's Kloof and Red Hill are not mentioned, and it would appear either that the Staff was unaware of these or did not believe that the enemy were in great force in that direction. Though that contingency was, as we shall see, provided for, the exact importance attached to the more westerly of the Boer defences by the Head-



THE ROAD BRIDGE AT COLENSO

quarter Staff may have influenced the views and conduct of the officer in command of the left wing.

The intention being to force the passage of the Tugela, the 5th Brigade (Irish), under General Hart, was ordered to move at 4.30 a.m. towards the Bridle Drift,[1] immediately west of the junction of Dornkop Spruit and the Tugela. The Spruit strikes the river before it bends northward for the loop, and the drift is south-east of the base of Red Hill. General Hart would then arrive just opposite the extremity

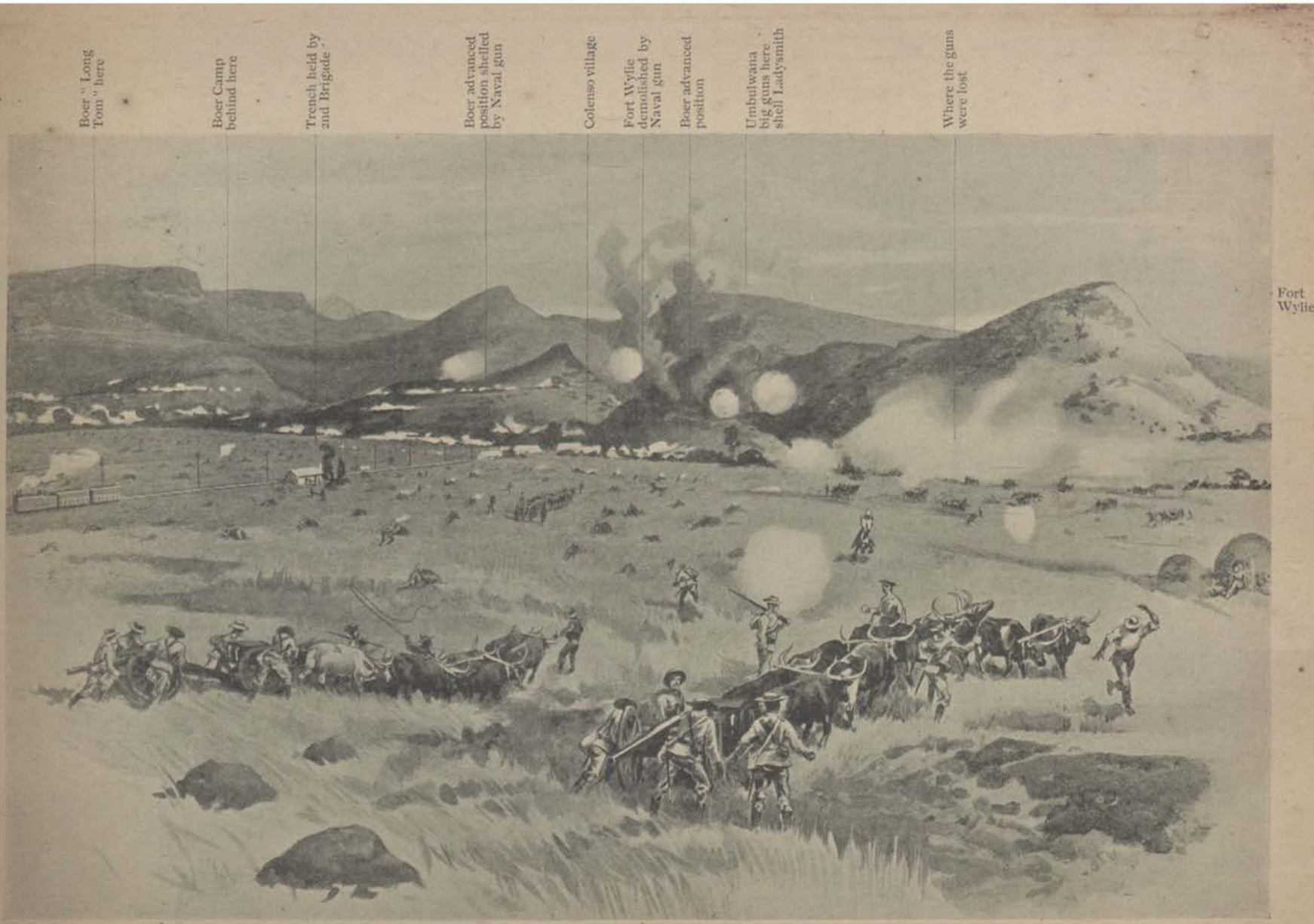
[1] In some maps two Bridle Drifts are marked, one opposite Red Hill, the other just west of the loop. There was a third drift, called Punt Drift, within the loop itself.

(so far as we knew it to have extended) of the Boer right. He was to cross at this point and then bear right along the bank towards the kopjes north of the iron footbridge, which was still intact. By so doing he would strike the right flank of the lower line of Boer defences and materially assist Hildyard in his attack on Colenso. Should he be unable to carry out this plan, he would hold fast the enemy's right and prevent it from reinforcing the left.

The 2nd Brigade (English), under Hildyard, was to advance at the same hour on the iron bridge along a gentle spur to westward of the railway. The Brigade was to force the passage and seize the kopjes.

The 4th Brigade (Light), under Lyttelton, was to move at 4.30 a.m. to a point half-way between Bridle Drift and the railway, whence it could reinforce either Hart or Hildyard. It was to be followed by the 2nd Brigade Division R.A., which, unless it received special orders from Hart, was to take up a position whence it could enfilade the kopjes north of the bridge. On its right the two 4·7 inch guns and four long 12-pounders, under Captain Jones, R.N., were to advance about a mile, and open fire on the kopjes at a range of 5,000 yards. Hart's left flank was covered by the 1st Royal Dragoons.

On the east of the railway the 6th Brigade (Fusiliers), under General Barton, less half a battalion of Royal Scots, who, with Bethune's Horse, were to guard the baggage, was to move at 4.30 a.m. in the direction of Hlangwane Hill, so as either to support Hildyard's right flank or the mounted troops as occasion required. These last, under Colonel the Earl of Dundonald, were to advance at the same hour on Hlangwane, covering the right of the general movement, and endeavour to come into action on the hill against the Fort Wylie kopjes. Dundonald's force consisted of the 13th Hussars, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, three squadrons of the South African Light Horse under Major Byng, and the "composite" regiment under Major Walter, made up of a mounted company of the 60th Rifles and Dublin Fusiliers, one company of Natal Carbineers, and one of Imperial Light Horse. They must have numbered more than the 1,000 men mentioned in the order. They were to be accompanied by the 7th Battery R.A.,


Boer "Long Tom" here
Boer Camp behind here
Trench held by 2nd Brigade
Boer advanced position shelled by Naval gun
Colenso village
Fort Wylie demolished by Naval gun
Boer advanced position
Umbulwana big guns here shell Ladysmith
Where the guns were lost
Fort Wylie

PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO, DECEMBER 15, 1899

while the 14th and 66th, the other two batteries belonging to Colonel Long's brigade division, and six naval 12-pounders under Lieut. Ogilvie, R.N., were to move east of the railway at 3.30 a.m. and proceed "under cover of the 6th Brigade to a point from which it could prepare the crossing for the 2nd Brigade."

It is clear from this order that the objects of the attack were the often-mentioned kopjes north of Colenso. The general plan practically amounted to an attack all along the line by Dundonald, Hildyard, and Hart. If the wings failed, it was hoped that they would hold the enemy fast while the centre delivered its attack. If the centre failed, the wings might succeed in rendering the enemy's central position untenable. The brigades of Lyttelton and Barton, both of which practically acted as reserves, were to be employed according to circumstances. It must be confessed that this scheme was, to say the least, indefinite. It closely resembled Lord Methuen's order at the Modder. The whole was to advance in parallel order in the hope of getting over somewhere. Every part of the front line was to try its hardest so that if one fraction failed the other might succeed. Except for the concentration of the artillery, we can discover nothing of the grand massing of force at the one decisive point which marks the plan of a commander who knows what he has to do and how to do it. This indefiniteness was we believe, mainly due to ignorance of the enemy's strength and positions.

At dawn on the 15th the troops moved out of camp, and at 5.30 the naval battery in the centre, supported by two of Lyttelton's battalions, opened fire on Fort Wylie. As the light grew and the troops moved to their respective positions the cannonade quickened though not a single shot was received in reply. Steadily, under a cloudless sky, the British line of battle developed, and from the Boer positions every battalion, squadron, and battery were plainly visible as the whole moved statelily towards the river. Fort Wylie and the kopjes near it were now covered with the smoke of bursting shell, but the other parts of the Boer position were silent and apparently untenanted. Shortly before 6 a.m.[1] Colonel Long crossed the railway

[1] *Times*, January 7th.

THE BATTLE OF COLENSO: THE ATTEMPT OF THE DUBLIN FUSILIERS TO CROSS THE TUGELA

and descended towards the river. A mile behind him was Barton, on his left was Hildyard, far to the left again were the solid masses of Hart's brigade.

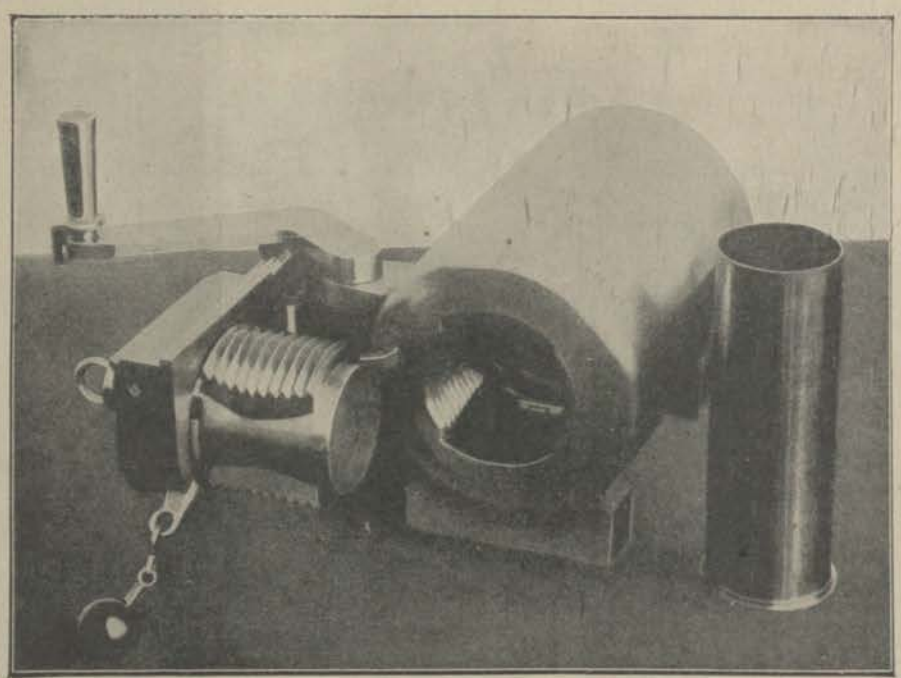
It was some time after 6 a.m. when the Irish battalions, still in quarter-column, and only a few hundred yards from the river, were suddenly assailed by a furious and accurate fire of cannon. The actual position of the brigade at this moment is uncertain. It is clear, however, that they had tended too much to their right, and instead of striking the desired point at Bridle Drift, had become entangled in the dongas about Dornkop Spruit. No scouts had been sent out to reconnoitre the stream, or it would have been discovered that the Boers had thrown a dam below the drift and so rendered it impassable. To the discipline of any but the best troops, hampered by ground and in hopelessly indefensible formations, the outburst of shot from Red Hill and the trenches around the loop would have been fatal. There was, however, no panic among Hart's men. The leading battalions—the Dublin Fusiliers and the Connaughts—managed in spite of the fire to extend, and pushed into the loop.

Alternately advancing and firing, the irregular masses struggled grimly forward through the reedy dongas, men falling at every step, and the dry ground spurting dust in every direction. Without a waver in the line the gaps were filled, and the succeeding battalions, Inniskillings and Border Regiment, opened out to left and rear of their comrades. Method there was none, but the advance was magnificent. The further the men pressed the hotter grew the fire. Boer guns within short range of the loop-head hurled their shell into the head of the column, for column it was, raking it with splinters and shrapnel bullets; the Mauser fire, less deadly, it is said,[1] than the artillery, ploughed unceasingly through its flanks, redoubling as each company rose and rushed forward. All the while no enemy was to be seen. The men did their best to return the fire, but beyond a thin line of smoke barely visible along the rough ground behind the river, there was nothing to aim at. Still the Dublins and Connaughts pushed on. Some few of the enemy are mentioned as having been on the southern bank; if this was so their trenches must have been carried and the surviving

[1] See letters from an officer published in *To-day*.

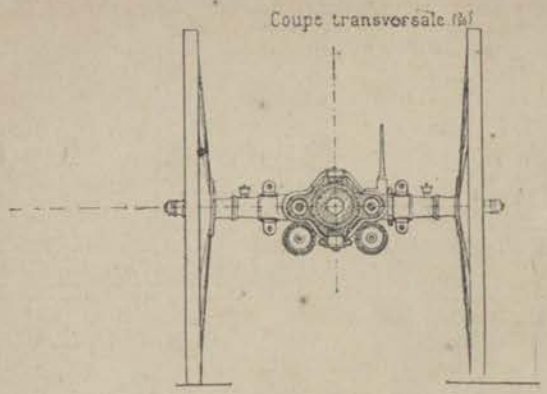
A 75 MILLIMETRE CREUSOT QUICK-FIRING GUN AT COLENSO

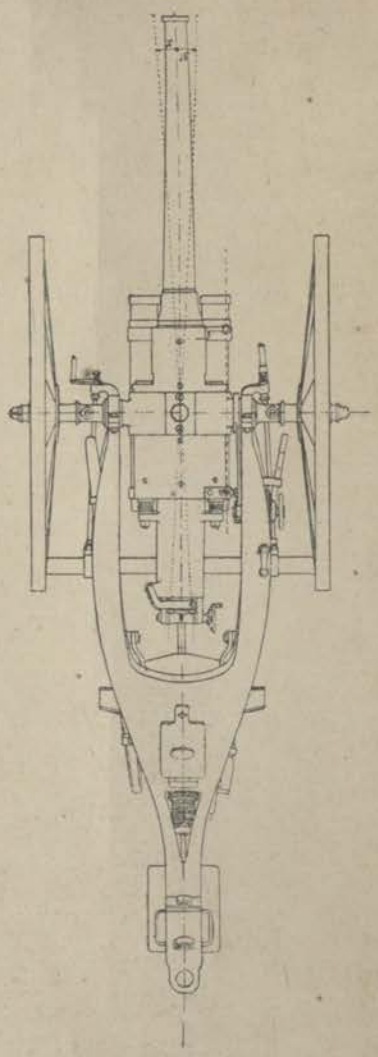
occupants have swum the river. After a protracted struggle the foremost line reached the river bank and strove to find a means of crossing. But the stream was too deep to ford, and some of the gallant men who tried to swim were dragged down with the weight of their arms and equipment and drowned. Others, it is said, became entangled in submerged barbed wire, and perished. Slowly and reluctantly the assailants relinquished the impossible task. The whole brigade lay scattered along the river bank, the Dublins and Connaughts in the loop, the Border regiment partly mingled with them, partly in rear and to the left, the

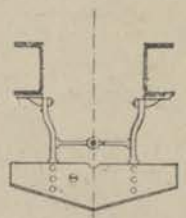


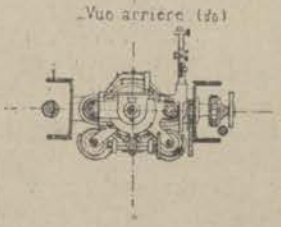
THE BREECH OF THE CREUSOT GUN

Inniskillings lining the stream nearer Bridle Drift. Here during four hours they lay, firing in the direction of an invisible enemy, and suffering with stubborn stoicism. The two field batteries, belonging to the 2nd Brigade Division, which had been placed at Hart's orders, and had followed the infantry, became involved in the first confusion, and were with difficulty withdrawn. Nor, when they succeeded in reaching a safe position and in coming into action, did their weighty shell fire master the enemy's guns and riflemen. The latter were well covered by their trenches, the former could only be reached by the naval guns.









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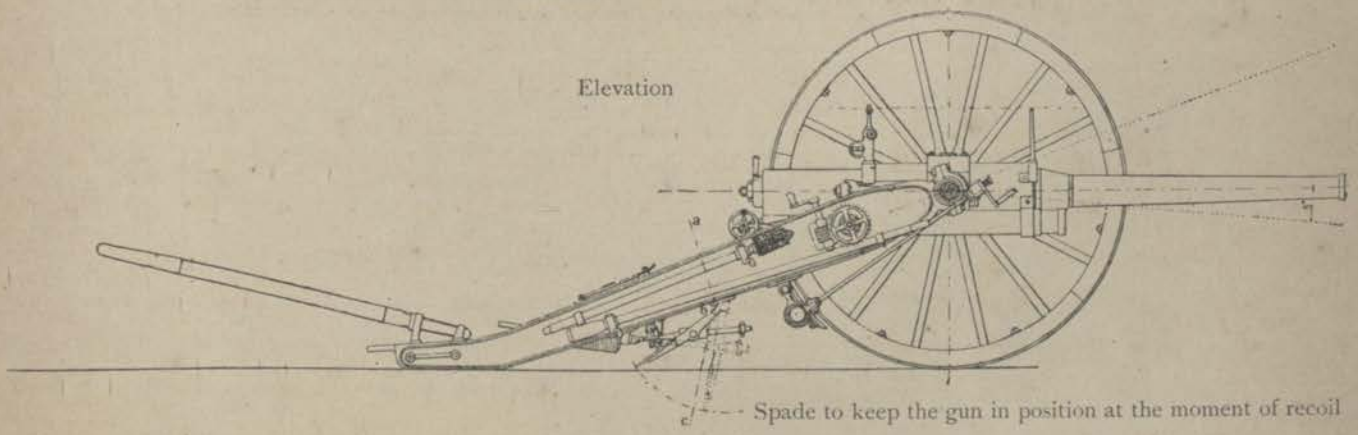


PLAN OF THE CREUSOT GUN IN ACTION

and these were fully occupied with Fort Wylie. The Royal Dragoons were far to the left and under the circumstances powerless to help the infantry.

Looking from his central station near the Naval Battery, Sir Redvers could see Hart's false movement towards the river loop, and sent to recall him. The messenger arrived too late. The Irish Brigade was already compromised, and the General galloping hurriedly across the front of Lyttelton's brigade, called upon its commander to advance and cover Hart's retirement. Half the reserve was ordered forward, and the English General rode towards his central attack, upon the success of which everything now depended.

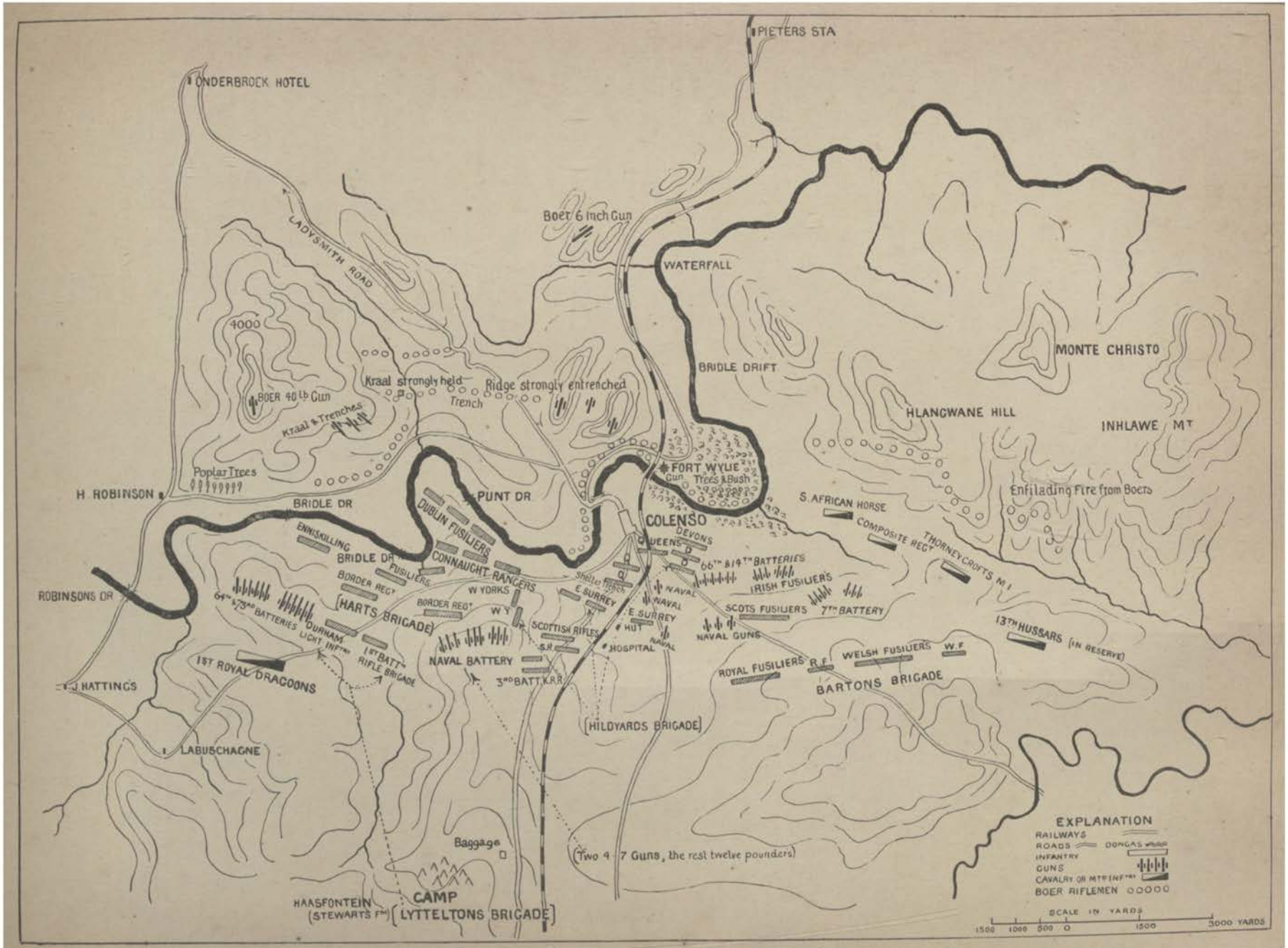
General Hildyard had advanced about the same time as Hart, and extending his first line, consisting of the West Surreys (Queen's), with the Devons in support, moved straight upon Colenso. As was the case elsewhere, the enemy withheld their fire until the foremost companies were within 2,000 yards of the river, when the Boer artillery, which had not replied to the naval guns, opened a heavy and accurate fire of shrapnel. With heads held high and regardless of the cannonade the infantry marched steadily forward, line upon line traversing the zone of bursting shell in perfect order and with unaltered pace. Here and there men dropped, and their comrades without hurry or hesitation passed on. A little nearer, and with a sudden crash the storm of musketry burst upon the successive waves of infantry, which, still erect and unmoved, went quietly forward. Then was seen with how little effect our guns had bombarded the Boer positions. From Fort Wylie and the further kopjes, from the river banks, and from Colenso itself, a wasting hail of fire swept the plain, beating it into clouds of dust. In one increasing volume of lead and iron, and with a tremendous din, 6-inch shells, 1-lb. shells, and rifle bullets tore through the thin lines, still advancing without a falter, though the gaps grew momentarily wider. As yet not a shot had been fired in reply. With the regularity of a parade the Devons and West Surreys moved impassively on; and behind them went the devoted stretcher-bearers and surgeons, gathering up the shattered *débris* that the advance had left. Behind them thundered the Naval

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO

Note.—This bird's-eye view and that on pp. 348, 349 are valuable as sketches of the Boer positions. The marked situations of the various troops are not to be relied on

Battery of the centre, the shells of which, falling fast along the hillsides, fired the dried herbage of the veldt and spread a thick pall of dust-laden smoke along the enemy's positions. But the lower trenches the guns failed to silence, and the storm of rifle shot never slackened. Nevertheless the resistless rhythm of the infantry advance was not broken. Not until the Queen's got within four hundred yards of Colenso did they lie down, and threw a few crashing volleys into the scrub that ringed the village. Then in a series of short rushes the battalion pressed on to the outskirts of the houses, taking a Boer shelter trench on their way, and spreading wider the right horn of their attack. Some of the Devons moved east of the railway and in company with the Queen's, chased the Boers over the edge of the plateau, out of the scattered pits and down the declivity near the bridge. Then for a moment the enemy's fire died away and a mass of runners covered the slopes beyond the river. To onlookers the position seemed won, and the naval guns trained upon the flanks of Fort Wylie, reserved their fire under the belief that what they saw were our own infantrymen. They were disillusioned by the tremendous outburst of rifle fire in the village as Hildyard's men, now for the first time catching sight of their opponents, poured volley after volley into the groups of fugitives. The opportunity was momentary; for the enemy were merely abandoning their first line of defence, in order to fall back to their second on the low kopjes beyond the river trenches.

So far Hildyard's attack had prospered. Whether he could have afterwards crossed the stream and stormed the further positions is very uncertain, but the practicability of the attempt went untested. For while his splendid advance was in progress, the fight beyond the railway had ended disastrously, and Sir Redvers, as he turned to direct the movements of his centre, learnt that Long's artillery had been overwhelmed with rifle fire. Believing that the naval guns, as well as the field batteries, had been destroyed, the English Commander decided that without guns it would be useless to attempt to force the river, and bent all his energies to safely withdrawing the force already in action. Therefore, bidding Hildyard to direct the right of his infantry upon the guns, and to push his leading battalion on Colenso, without becoming



THE BATTLE OF COLENSO, DECEMBER 15, 1899

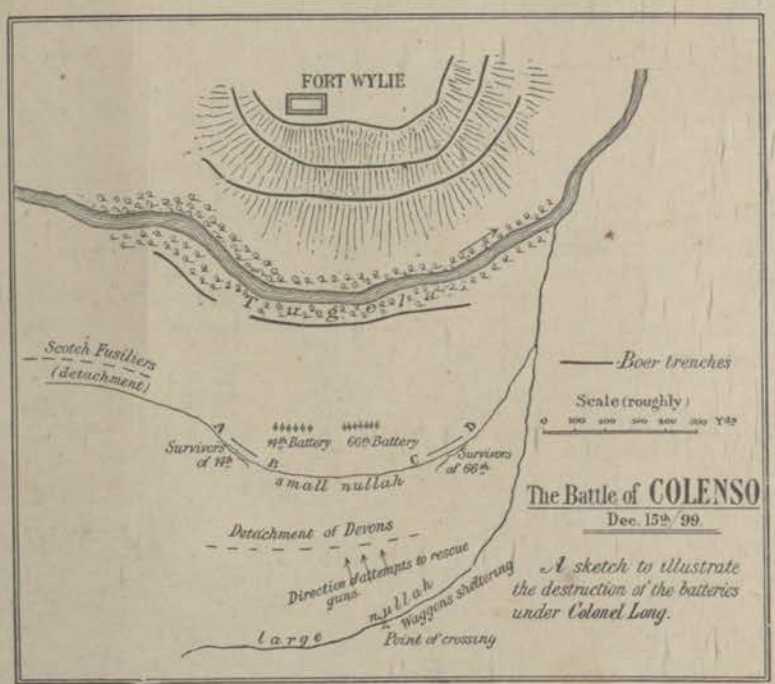
too hotly engaged, he rode towards the spot where the wreck of the batteries lay.

Colonel Long had entered the plain east of the railway, and opened fire upon Fort Wylie. Without waiting for Barton's brigade, he resolved to get into decisive range at once, and advanced with his two field batteries upon a clump of timber near the river bank about a mile east of Colenso. The oxen-drawn naval 12-pounders under Lieutenant Ogilvy, R.N., followed at a considerable interval, a circumstance to which they owed their safety. Long rode ahead of his guns, and selected a position about 500 yards from the bank of the Tugela, and 1,200 from the shattered crest of Fort Wylie. It was now about 6 a.m. The naval battery in the centre had bombarded the hill for some time without receiving a single shot in return, and there was an impression that it had been evacuated. Without sending ground scouts[1] forward to reconnoitre the river-bed, the high scarped banks of which were thickly fringed with trees and scrub, Long called up his batteries, which trotted forward and wheeled to unlimber. Just at this moment, when artillery is most vulnerable, a single shell burst in their midst, and this was followed by a hurricane of shot from cannon and rifles. The effect was deadly and instantaneous. The guns, indeed, were got into position and opened fire, but the teams were, practically speaking, annihilated; many of the horses went down, some took fright and bolted, and others wheeled in frenzied circles round the carcases to which they were harnessed, struggling madly to get free. Nor did the detachments suffer less. Captain Goldie, of the 14th, which was on the left, was killed; another officer was wounded; and one of the first Boer shells, bursting just over one of the guns, struck down the whole detachment. In the 66th one subaltern was killed and two wounded. In the first quarter of an hour Colonel Long was dangerously wounded by a rifle bullet through the arm and liver, Colonel Hunt, second in command, was shot through both legs. All ranks suffered in proportion. The position was absolutely unsheltered. A small donga, about thirty yards behind the batteries, and so shallow that even in its deeper parts it barely afforded shelter for a prostrate man, formed the only

[1] See below.

THE HANDY MAN

available cover. To this the wounded were carried, and here for hours the sufferers lay, exposed to the burning sun. The unfortunate Commander, with the crash of bursting shell, the hurried thunder of his own guns and the groans of his men ringing in his ears, protested resolutely against the abandonment of the pieces until he fell into a delirium. A few yards in front Majors Bailward and Forster did all that gallant officers could do to remedy a hopeless situation. The rush of rifle bullets, ever more insidious and more deadly than shell, rained faster and faster. From the railway bridge, from the river banks, from rifle pits scarcely a quarter of a mile away, came a ceaseless stream of shot,



scourging the ground into fine dust, splashing upon the guns and limbers, and striking down the gunners.

The Boer guns, using smokeless powder, could not be located, and to the end of the fight their exact positions were never known; but as the shells seemed to come from Fort Wylie, both batteries rained shrapnel upon it till its fire was silenced, and all the ammunition with the guns—some forty rounds apiece—was exhausted. The teams of waggons, a quarter of a mile behind, could not, owing to the severity of the Boer fire, bring up fresh supplies. Bailward therefore, as senior officer, ordered the remaining men to

THE LAST TWO GUNNERS

T

retire to the donga, and here for some hours they lay, crouching in the watercourse, towards which the slightest sign of activity attracted a fresh outburst of fire. The breech-pieces, sights, and tangent scales were left on the guns, for a new supply of ammunition was still expected, and it was hoped that infantry might also arrive. In the hour that the guns had been in action seven officers and over thirty men had been killed or wounded. With the exception of some fifty Scots Fusiliers on the left of the batteries the latter were still completely isolated. Fully 500 yards farther back were the naval guns, under Ogilvy. He had commenced to cross a nullah when the enemy opened fire upon Long. Two of his guns were across, two were in the donga, and two behind it. The native drivers bolted, and only with great difficulty and by the aid of some artillery horses, did the sailors get the pieces safely back. Opening fire from some ground above the watercourse, they did excellent service for the rest of the day, greatly aiding the retirement of the troops, and silencing every Boer gun they were able to locate. Only three men were wounded, for though the battery was well within rifle-range, the weight of the Boer fire was directed against the 14th and 66th, or against the waggons and oxen, twenty-eight of whom were killed or lost. Barton's Brigade was now far to the right rear. Except for the half-battalion of Scots Fusiliers, which seems to have been detailed as an escort for the guns, none of his troops appear to come anywhere near the batteries. Hildyard's advanced battalions were, however, within comparatively easy reach, and at his order Colonel Bullock, of the Devons, proceeded to the donga in which the wounded were lying and took command. With him came about sixty of his regiment, who straggled up by twos and threes and mixed with the gunners, who were scattered for several hundred yards along the watercourse. It was about 8 a.m., and a comparative lull had taken place in the fight when Buller, riding towards the Tugela under a lively fire of shell, came up to Ogilvy's battery, and, realising that it was useless to attempt to fight the guns any more, sent his A.D.C., Captain Schofield, to order the waggons, who were sheltering in the nullah in front of Ogilvy's guns, to bring them off.

Scarcely had the teams reached the top of the bank than a

SAVING THE GUNS AT COLENSO

shower of shell and bullets fell around them, and most of them retreated into the nullah. The Commander-in-chief, who, with Clery, was standing exposed to the fire, then called out, "Some of you go and help Schofield." The call was gallantly responded to. Captain Congreve, of the Rifle Brigade, and Lieutenant Roberts, A.D.C. to Clery, with two or three others, went to the waggons, and with the aid of a corporal and six gunners got two of them horsed. Then urging the horses to their utmost speed, they dashed across the open towards the guns. In a moment the Boer fire trebled, and shot fell like hail around the devoted riders. Roberts was hit three times and fell mortally wounded, Congreve was grazed on the elbow and hit in the leg; his horse, thrice struck, fell near the small nullah, and into this he crawled. Three horses in the teams were hit, but none fell, and Schofield succeeded in bringing off two of Forster's guns (66th), which, owing to a swell in the ground in front, were less exposed to the rifle fire. As Schofield was hooking up one of these, one of the drivers, mindful of the rough ground and regardless of the danger, said, "Elevate the muzzle, sir"[1]—an instance of coolness worthy to be classed with the words of the man who, on the hillside at Alma helped Sir George Brown to remount, saluted, and said, "Are your stirrups the right length, Sir?" By marvellous luck the guns were safely withdrawn.

But to save the remaining ten was impossible. The Boers had now the exact range, and in Sir Redver's own words "such a deadly fire was kept up that although several attempts were made to cover the fatal five hundred yards, either horses or men, or both, were killed before they got to the guns." A final effort was made by Captain Reed, of the 7th Battery, which had accompanied Dundonald's cavalry. Seeing Long's disaster, his commanding officer sent him down with three teams. Following the same route as Schofield, he crossed the nullah with thirteen men and twenty-two horses. Before he had gone half way he was hit in the thigh, one of his men was killed, five wounded, and thirteen horses had fallen. Convinced as to the

[1] "The Relief of Ladysmith," by J. B. Atkins.

THE VICTORIA CROSS AT COLENSO

1. LIEUT. THE HONBLE. F. ROBERTS
2. CAPTAIN CONGREVE
3. CAPTAIN REED
4. CORPORAL NURSE

futility of further efforts, the General ordered the guns to be abandoned.[1]

It was now, according to some accounts, half-past nine, according to others, nearly eleven. On the left and centre the British attack had come to a standstill. Lyttelton had gone forward to cover the retirement of the Irish Brigade, which was now endeavouring to withdraw itself from the horrible entanglement into which it had fallen. Hildyard was awaiting the order to retreat.

Only on one of the southern spurs of Hlangwane did we appear to gain any ground. Lord Dundonald had marched thither in the morning, and leaving the 13th Hussars in reserve, had dismounted the rest of his force and pushed them up the hill, the South African Light Horse on the left, the Composite Regiment in the centre, Thorneycroft's Horse on the right. Behind these stood the 7th Battery vigorously shelling the hill-crest. For a time all went well. Though the fire from the ridge was hot, the irregulars steadily gained ground, when a party of Boers, riding round the right flank of the attack, opened a heavy fire from the side of a gully, up which Thorneycroft was advancing. He suffered some loss, and the flanking movement which Dundonald had intended was checked. On the left the South African Light Horse got within 700 yards of the summit, and began exchanging a vigorous fusillade with Boers in a stone kraal near the ridge. So sharp was the enemy's musketry that further advance was not attempted, and the order to retire found the corps in the same position. The retreat was not effected without loss; the Light Horse especially suffering as they crossed a piece of ploughed land, against the dark surface of which the khaki uniforms were clearly visible. Only the well-directed fire of the 7th Battery saved them further loss in their somewhat tardy retirement. Dundonald's brigade had ninety-five casualties, a heavy percentage for these days on a total of barely 1,000 men. In Lord Dundonald's opinion[2] the hill

[1] The following received the Victoria Cross: Congreve, Reed, Roberts, and Corporal Nurse. Nineteen others, fifteen of whom were drivers, received the Medal for Distinguished Service in the Field.

[2] "Relief of Ladysmith," by J. B. Atkins.

could have been carried, for it was not then so strongly fortified or manned as it was two months later. It is hardly likely that the Boers would have allowed its occupation without strenuous efforts to retake it, but if Dundonald was right, it was doubly unfortunate that General Buller did not attack it with a strong force of infantry and artillery, and confine himself to a feint at Colenso.

The General, in his despatch, appears to have regarded Dundonald's action as a purely defensive one. This, taking into

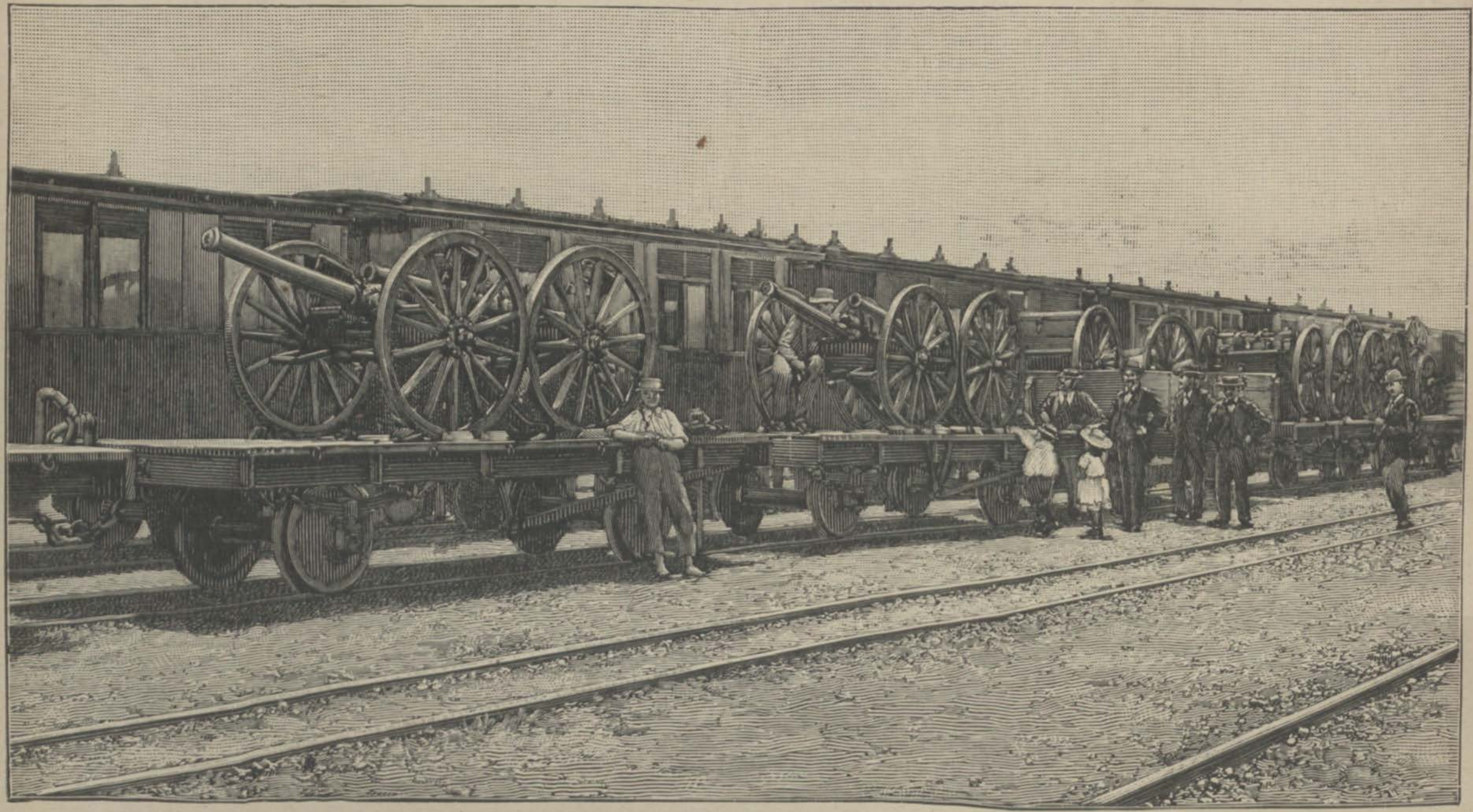
THE GRAVE OF LIEUTENANT ROBERTS

consideration the other accounts, seems hardly correct. No doubt, however, the enemy pressed the mounted infantry sharply in the retreat, and it was probably in support of the cavalry that the Irish Fusiliers and part of the Scots Fusiliers came into action. Where the mishap occurred in which the latter lost six officers and thirty-nine men taken prisoners is not clear. Possibly they were surrounded while covering the withdrawal of the cavalry.

The order to retreat seems to have reached Dundonald about midday, and at this hour the whole line had begun to fall back. The

Irish Brigade was now retiring under a merciless fire, which caused them heavier loss than the advance. Some who had actually crossed the river were left behind and captured. But despite the desperate ordeal through which they had passed, the men, pursued by shells long after they were beyond the zone of rifle fire, marched cheerfully back, covered by Lyttelton's brigade, which was never seriously engaged, and lost only ten men in all. Hildyard withdrew with the same stately precision which had marked his advance. Though the fire was as heavy and the casualties more numerous, there was not a sign of hurry or panic, and not a man was captured. By 2 p.m. the last line of the Brigade passed Captain Jones' battery, whereupon, their task accomplished, the gallant Bluejackets also withdrew their 12-pounders to the spot from which they had bombarded the enemy on the preceding day. The 4·7-inch guns had retired two hours before. These long-range ordnance, firing at distances of from 3,000 to 11,000 yards, had reached and temporarily silenced all the Boer guns that were visible, from a large gun on Red Hill to the smaller pieces on Fort Wylie. In his report Captain Jones states that the largest Boer gun was hidden from his view, but placed so that it could enfilade the principal approaches to the river. This, with others, he could not locate, but his fire along the Boer trenches was certainly telling and greatly facilitated the retreat of the infantry after Long's disaster. There were no casualties in the Naval Battery, the Boers wisely devoting their attention to our nearer infantry and field artillery.

One other unfortunate incident yet remains to be recorded. When Hildyard fell back, the half-battalion of Devons, which formed his right, retired in line with some troops which were believed to be the companies under Colonel Bullock. It was found too late that they were Scots Fusiliers, so that the detachment with Long never got the order to retire, and remained in the donga till 3 p.m. Roberts had been carried in by Bailward, Major Babtie, R.A.M.C., and Congreve, and lay for hours near Long, the heads of the wounded protected from the sun by coats and blankets, and their sufferings intensified by thirst. Not till the whole British army had withdrawn did the Boers leave the river-bed and the village and approach the solitary line of guns. Bullock



THE DESPATCH OF THE ENGLISH GUNS CAPTURED BY THE BOERS AT COLENSO

asked them to retire until the wounded had been removed, but they refused. He then called out, "Keep away from the guns, or I shall fire," and two Boers were actually shot, when the enemy showed a white flag and came forward to parley. Meanwhile a hundred more, who had crept round on the right and had taken Forster's men prisoners half an hour earlier, came up on the flank and rear of the small detachment. Resistance was hopeless, for Bullock had only thirty-three rifles with him, but he refused to surrender, and was knocked down with a clubbed rifle. Five artillery officers and sixty-four men, four officers of the Devons and thirty-three men were taken prisoners. The wounded were with a few exceptions left to the care of our own ambulances.

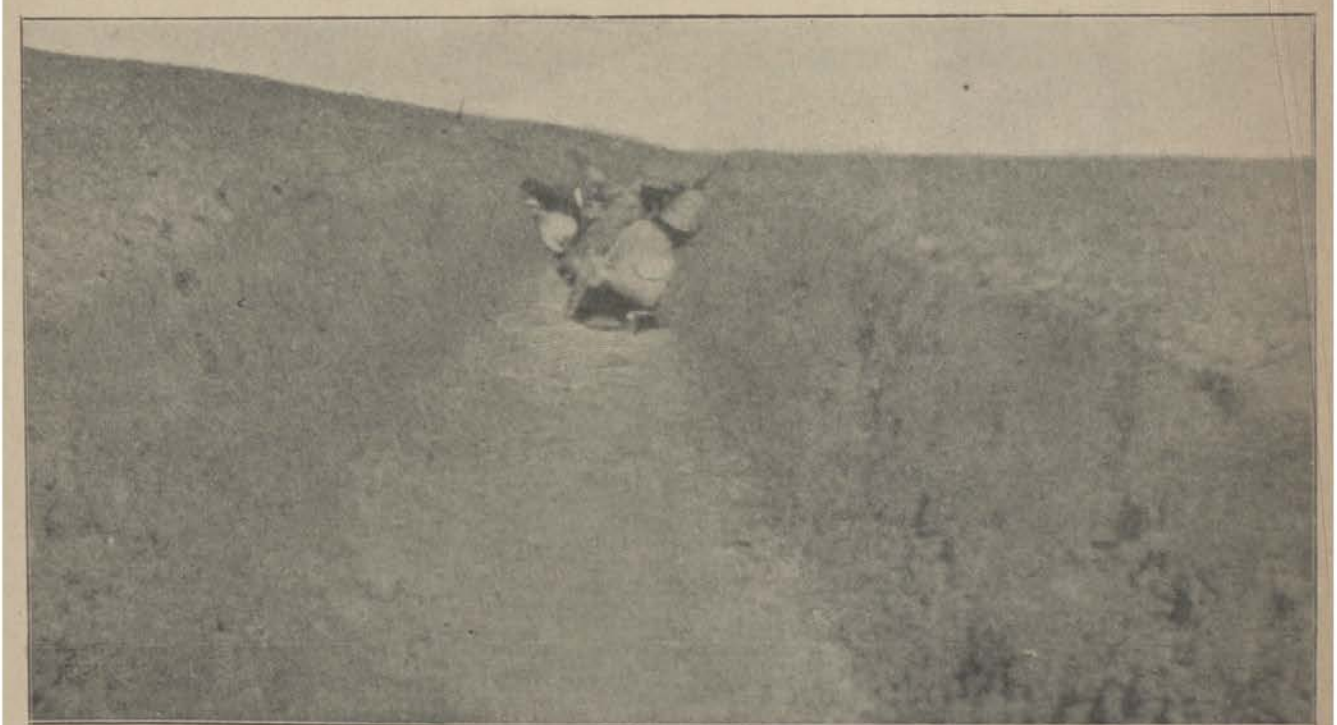
By half-past three all firing had ceased. Next day an armistice was agreed to, in order to collect the wounded. Our losses, though heavy, were not so great as might have been expected; 1,152 of all ranks were killed, wounded, and missing, amongst them seventy-eight officers. An examination of the way in which the casualties were distributed is interesting and suggestive. The following is a table of losses suffered by Hart's Brigade, and will bear comparison with Magersfontein :—

	Killed.		Wounded.		Missing and Prisoners.			
	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.		Total.
Border Regiment	...	6	3	42	...	1	=	52
Connaughts	...	24	2	103	2	23	=	154
2nd R. Dublin Fus.	2	38	3	148	...	28	=	219
Inniskillings	1	17	10	76	...	8	=	112
	3	85	18	369	2	60		537

The losses in Hildyard's brigade, which with Hart's bore the brunt of the fighting, were :—

	Killed.		Wounded.		Missing and Prisoners.			
	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.		Total.
Royal West Surrey (Queen's)	...	7	2	85	...	...	=	94
Royal East Surrey	...	1	...	31	Surrendered with Bullock.		=	32
2nd Devons	...	9	6	60	4	33	=	112
Royal West Yorks	...	...	1	...	...	...	=	1
	...	17	9	176	4	33		239

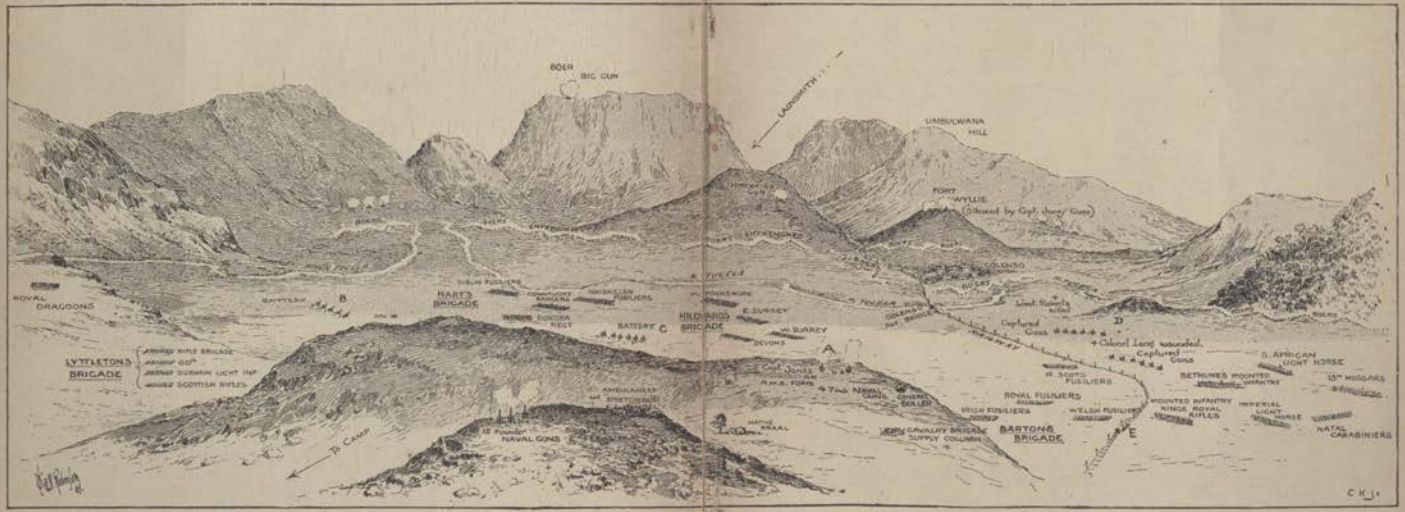
The two unfortunate batteries, according to the official reports, lost—the 14th, two officers and twenty-one men killed and wounded, forty missing; the 66th, three officers and fourteen men killed and wounded, twenty-four missing. The only other battalions who suffered heavily were the Scots Fusiliers, who lost six officers and thirty-nine men taken prisoners and thirty-two killed and wounded, and the Irish Fusiliers, who lost twenty-three killed and wounded and thirteen prisoners. Barton's other battalions did not come into action at all. Possibly the aggressive attitude



MEN SHELTERING IN A TRENCH TAKEN FROM THE BOERS

of the enemy on his right caused him to hold them in reserve. It was unfortunate that he could not spare a battalion in support of the guns, but, as his attention had to be directed upon two widely separated points, decisive action was more than usually difficult.

Of the Boer losses no reliable estimate is forthcoming. Their own official figure of thirty casualties is *ipso facto* absurd. At the same time the figures of 115 killed mentioned by Mr. Burleigh appears too high. This would mean a total of 500 or 600 casualties in all, and, considering they were barely visible and well protected, is scarcely a



SKETCH PLAN OF THE BATTLEFIELD OF COLENSO, DECEMBER 15, 1899

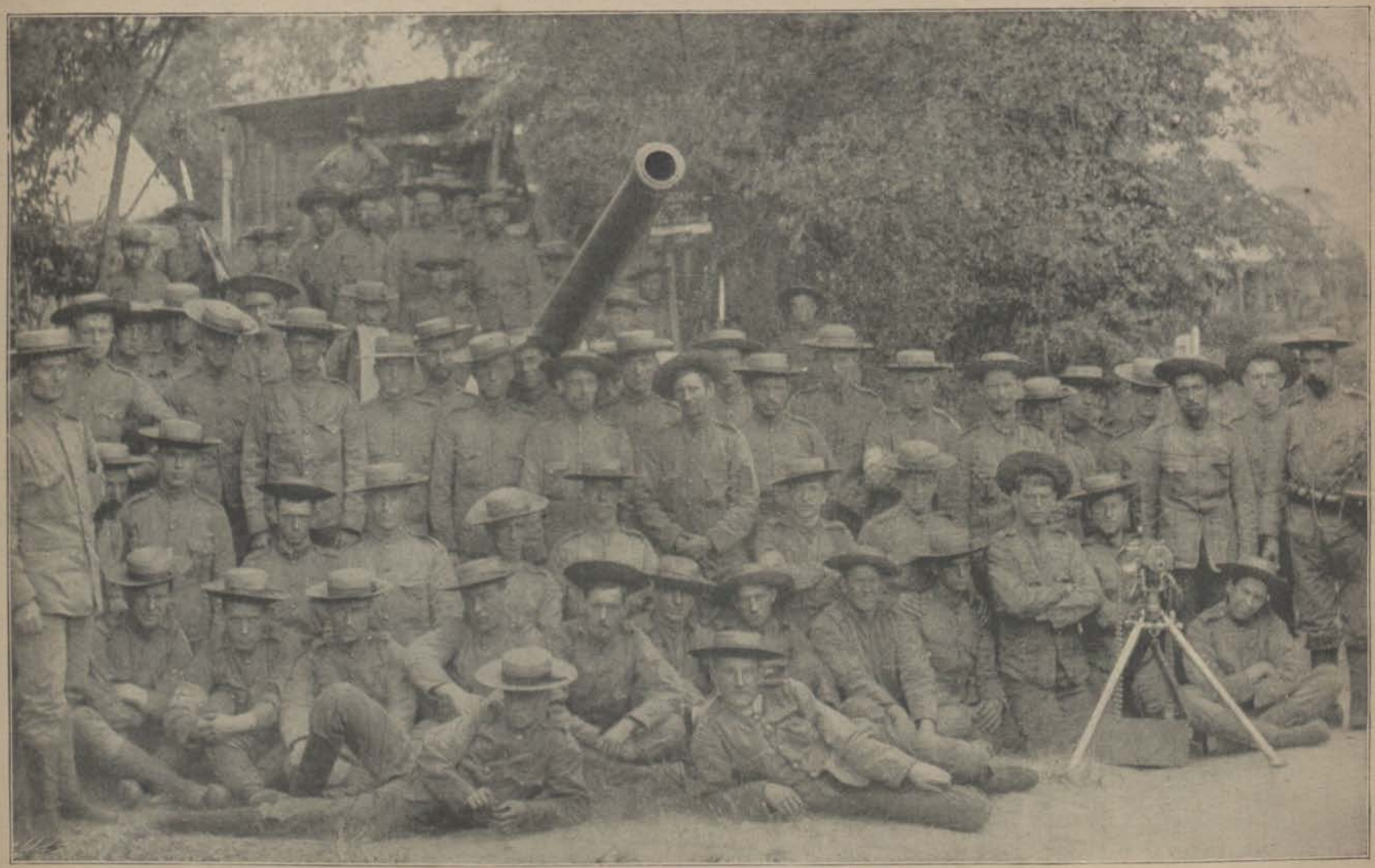
(See note on page 331.)

probable figure. Without further data it is quite impossible to speak definitely. One thing at least is certain; irregulars do not bear loss as well as disciplined troops, and the Boer is a very prudent irregular. If our shell fire had really taken the effect which was generally expected the Boer would not have remained in his position.

So ended Buller's first attempt to relieve Ladysmith. Viewed at this distance of time, the battle, as fought, was a mistake. We have already referred to the probable causes which deterred Buller from attempting a flank movement on Springfield or Weenen, causes which

BOER OUTPOSTS

are summed up in the phrase, "relative mobility of the opposing forces." At the same time, it is difficult to believe that these reasons were entirely adequate. Colenso was a bad place to choose for the point of attack; tactically, because the Boer positions were enormously strong; strategically, because no decisive success could follow a victory. A frontal attack does not crush, whereas a wide flanking movement would either have compelled the Boers to retire from Ladysmith or forced them to fight a battle to regain their communications. In the first case, Ladysmith would have been relieved without loss; in the second, the enemy could hardly have escaped an overwhelming defeat,



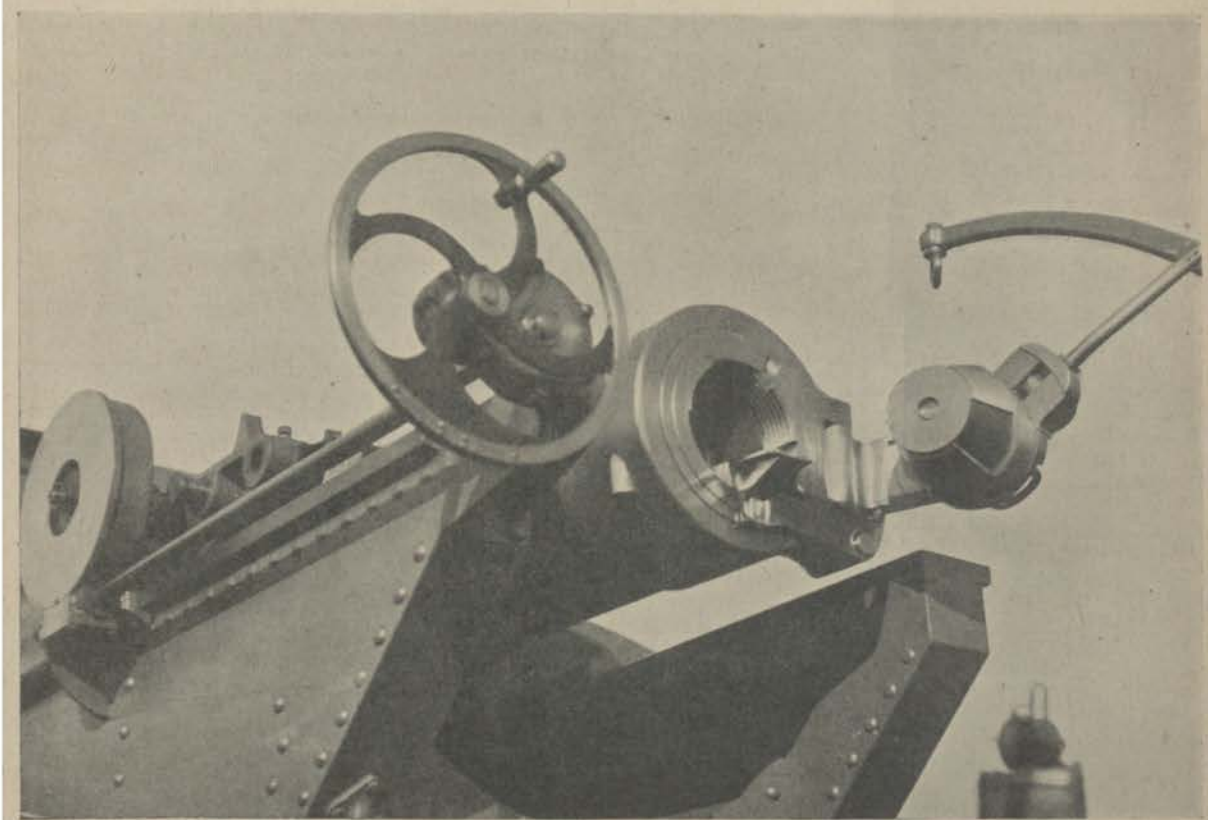
THE BLUEJACKETS OF H.M.S. *TERRIBLE* WITH THEIR 4·7 GUN

for in December General White's force was still fairly mobile and could have co-operated with the Relief Column. The march to Potgieter's Drift showed that the Boers could be surprised in spite of transport difficulties, and if it be answered that the transport was far better in January than in December, it may be asked, Could not General Buller have waited? He must have known that the town had sufficient supplies for two months, and General White has himself stated that he never pressed for a speedy relief. It would seem then that there was plenty of time to make the army mobile enough for a long and fast march, and to attempt the relief about the date of Spion Kop with the additional advantage of a fresh division under Sir Charles Warren. The delay would not have been popular in England and could not have produced a good effect in South Africa, but if the only alternative was a doubtful struggle at Colenso, the former would have been preferable. So much for a strategical solution of the problem. As has been said above, we believe that there was a tactical solution as well, namely, the occupation of Hlangwane. But as this was but a very subordinate feature of General Buller's plan, we leave this last alternative on one side and pass on to consider in brief some of the tactical aspects of the fight at Colenso which throw a strong light on modern war.

We find Buller committing himself to an attack on a position of enormous strength and unknown extent. His knowledge of the position seems to have been very slight, for, as was noted above, he had little idea of the elaborate entrenchments on Red Hill and along the river opposite Bridle Drift and the often-mentioned loop. Had he been aware of these, it is hard to believe that he would have calculated on Hart's co-operation towards Fort Wylie, a movement which would have exposed part, at least, of that General's brigade to a flanking fire from the northward, even if the strength of the enemy in numbers and positions had not rendered its execution utterly impossible.

It cannot be denied that the deep river and the watchfulness of the enemy rendered satisfactory reconnoitring exceedingly difficult. It is, in fact, not easy to see how cavalry reconnaissances could, under

such circumstances, accurately locate the hostile positions. We had in all 2,500 mounted men, and the way to obtain the necessary knowledge by their employment lay either in boldly crossing the stream and pressing the enemy so sharply as to compel them to disclose themselves, or in capturing stray parties. The first method entailed great risk, the last, as far as it goes, is valuable. Infantry reconnaissances, on the other hand, were liable to bring



THE BREECH (OPEN) OF A 6-IN. (100-POUNDER) NAVAL GUN

on a pitched battle at undesirable moments. Scouts in the shape of shells failed, as they had done at Magersfontein. A good system of spies could not have been easy to organise, for many of the population were disaffected, and the Boers themselves extraordinarily vigilant. In such secret methods of acquiring information we were probably far surpassed by our opponents. Nevertheless the fact remains that it is the business of the General to get good information, and that without it he is helpless. As complete knowledge

is impossible, it is his business to judge when he has learnt enough for his purpose. Without feeling sure of this he has no right to take a decisive step. None of the great captains ever allowed themselves to be hurried. We do not for a moment imply that General Buller acted lightly, but it would seem that he gravely overrated the accuracy of the information he possessed. So little was known that many thought that the attack was intended as a reconnaissance in force. Certainly General Buller was unfortunate in the loss of his guns and the rough handling suffered by Hart's brigade, but we cannot avoid the conclusion that the fight, even if successful, would not have been decisive, that further fighting would have been necessary to relieve Ladysmith, that the Boers would have managed to withdraw most of their men, guns, and material, and that while General White would have been freed. the more important task, the destruction of Joubert's army, would not have been accomplished. Such being the case it can only be regretted that a more clear and comprehensive plan of action was not thought feasible by the General and his advisers.

Very different is the question of scouting in front of the attacking troops. A German officer[1] has pointed out the want of this, especially in the case of Hart's brigade. Much of the confusion, uncertainty, and consequent loss, was due to the neglect of this obvious precaution. More fatal still was the indefensible formation in which the 5th Brigade advanced, a blunder quite inexplicable, and the importance of which is perhaps not unfairly indicated by a comparison of the casualties lists of Hildyard and Hart. The 2nd Brigade, which was exposed to fully as heavy a fire as the 5th, lost in the proportion of two to five, and at the end of the day had one battalion practically intact; the 5th had every corps closely engaged, and achieved no more than the 2nd. Bad maps and inadequate knowledge of the ground to be traversed may have further confused General Hart, but it is difficult to find an excuse for deliberately marching the brigade in quarter-column to within easy rifle range of the opposite bank and then

[1] Major von Estorff of the General Staff.

SOME OF THE GUNS CAPTURED BY THE BOERS AT COLENSO IN THE STATION SQUARE, PRETORIA

pushing it forward to a river which there was no certainty of crossing; an operation entailing serious loss which preliminary scouting would have prevented.

Hildyard's frontal attack is interesting less as a manœuvre than because it established an important fact, namely, that good infantry, properly extended, can and will face in the open the heaviest rifle fire without suffering unjustifiable losses or becoming demoralised. The Boer shells, accurately aimed and well fused, did remarkably little material damage, and if their effect can be considered a fair example of what modern artillery can do the theory that a frontal attack on a line of guns is impossible is destroyed.

Another question that arises with reference to Hildyard's movement is whether his brigade could have passed the Tugela and carried the kopjes without Hart's help. Buller thought that it could have been done with the help of Long's batteries. Judging from his despatch, it appears that he would have been prepared to continue the attack supported by Ogilvy's guns alone; but the supposed loss of half his artillery (eighteen guns in all) decided him to relinquish the attack. Whether he was right in withdrawing is a matter over which experts will probably never agree, some supporting the General, others condemning the whole scheme of attack, others maintaining that the effect of the cannonade was overrated, and that the infantry could have gone on alone. Seeing, however, that Long's batteries considerably diminished the Boer fire from Fort Wylie, and that the cessation of his guns was immediately followed by its vigorous renewal, most people will probably be of the opinion that the rapid shelling had cowed the enemy considerably, and that its continuance would have very greatly facilitated Hildyard's advance even if its absence did not render it absolutely impossible.

Of that melancholy incident a few remarks are necessary. Colonel Long is reported to have said that he acted strictly according to his orders, General Buller having personally explained what he was to do and where he was to go. The despatch is, however, exceedingly explicit. "His orders were to come into action covered by the 6th Brigade, which Brigade was not, as he knew, intended to advance on

AFTER THE BATTLE. THE IRISH BRIGADE

Colenso. I had personally explained to him where I wished him to come into action, *and with the Naval guns only, as the position was not within effective range of his field guns.*[1] Instead of this he advanced with his batteries so fast that he left both his Infantry escort and his oxen-drawn Naval guns behind, and came into action under Fort Wylie, a commanding trebly entrenched hill, at a range of 1,200 yards, and I believe within 300 yards of the enemy's rifle pits." It is clear from this that General Buller did not intend Colonel Long to get so near Colenso, but to keep more to his right and to reserve his field guns until the action had further developed, until, as we may suppose, the infantry attack had so far advanced that it threatened to mask the Naval guns, at which time the field batteries were to have galloped close up, and lent the whole weight of their fire to the final assault. This would have been a perfectly intelligible use of artillery, which, according to the greatest masters of wars, should at the moment of crisis shrink from no risk in order to give their infantry every assistance in their power. But this is a very different thing from preceding the infantry and taking position 500 yards from a dense belt of cover which had not been properly scouted. If it is true that ground scouts were pushed forward, and that one actually rode over Colenso bridge[3] without noticing the Boers along the river banks, then these men failed in their duty, and a part of the blame does not rest on the shoulders of Long; but, we repeat, the orders to follow the infantry, and only to come into action with the Naval guns were, as given above, perfectly clear and unanswerable.[2]

Every one will sympathise with the hard lot of the brave soldier who commanded the artillery at Omdurman, but it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that his own over-eagerness caused the catastrophe.

The abandonment of the guns after the battle has been sharply blamed. This is a question of relative importance. If they could have been with-

[1] The italics are ours.

[2] It was unfortunate that the personal explanation was not committed to paper. It could have then been seen exactly what Long's orders were, and the case could have been judged on written evidence. At the present moment we have merely the contradictory assertions of two honourable men to go upon.

[3] See Bennett Burleigh.

drawn without serious sacrifice of men, it would certainly have been worth while to do so; if, as was no doubt General Buller's opinion, the risk was too great, he was wise in not taking it. It was unfortunate that unforeseen circumstances made it impossible to render the guns useless to the enemy.[1]

No reliable estimate has been given of the number of Boers actually in the firing line. The fact that they moved to reinforce threatened points, riding from the right, after Hart's repulse, to confront Hildyard, further increases the difficulty of numerical judgment. Ten thousand is a moderate estimate, and it seems probable that the actual total was nearer fifteen. On our side were engaged two and a half brigades of infantry—for Lyttelton's men though they helped to cover Hart's retreat, scarcely came under fire—about 1,000 Light Horse,

A BUNDLE OF ENGLISH SMOKELESS CORDITE. FOUND NEAR LADYSMITH

and forty-two guns. While, therefore, we outnumbered the Boer artillery by nearly three to one, we were ourselves slightly outnumbered by the enemy in men. The proportions were not unlike those at the Modder, though our force of guns was much greater, and the cavalry more numerous. Hildyard advanced much in the same way as Methuen did, but the position had in the case of Colenso been first heavily shelled. The line of defence was more formidable, for the hills were higher and more extended, the entrenchments more elaborate the river deeper. In both battles the attack on the centre failed. In neither was the position properly reconnoitred. In neither was there any attempt at a strategical movement to a flank, and both fights alike showed the want of mobility of the British forces. It

[1] Most of them were sent to Pretoria, but it is alleged that some were used against us at Spion Kop.

was a defect which was to dog Buller's army to the gates of Ladysmith and beyond.

The events of the black week were complete, but the people of England were not shaken by the blows which had fallen so heavily and swiftly. The Government and the country rose to the occasion. Without wasting time in vain regret or useless irritation against the generals, orders were immediately issued for the mobilisation of a 6th and 7th division. Large reinforcements of every kind were got ready, Militia battalions were called out, and an appeal was made to the patriotism of the volunteers and yeomanry. How that call resounded throughout the length and breath of the Empire and how it was answered will be told hereafter. The most momentous step of all was the change in the supreme command. Recognising that the management of the entire forces in South Africa required too much of Sir Redvers Buller, now engaged in a life-and-death struggle to save Ladysmith, the Government called upon Lord Roberts, and that great veteran, with the loss of his gallant son heavy upon him, accepted the arduous task of silencing the disaffected, restoring order out of chaos, forming an army out of shattered fragments, and constructing a plan which should solve the vast problem before him. With him, as Chief of his Staff, went a man already famous as an organiser, Lord Kitchener of Khartoum. Two days after Colenso the new Commander-in-chief was formally nominated. On December 23rd he started for the Cape.

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CHAPTER XVII

POTGIETER'S DRIFT

AFTER COLENSO—GENERAL SITUATION UNCHANGED—BOER INABILITY TO FOLLOW UP A SUCCESS—TRACTION ENGINES—CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCES—THE ASSAULT ON LADYSMITH—BULLER'S DEMONSTRATION—PREPARATIONS FOR A MOVE COMPLETED—BULLER'S FORCE—TRANSPORT—GENERAL SCHEME—JANUARY 10TH ADVANCE—DUNDONALD'S MARCH TO POTGIETER'S DRIFT—IMPORTANCE OF THIS ACHIEVEMENT—SLOW MOVEMENTS OF INFANTRY AND BAGGAGE—FIRST STAGE OF OPERATIONS COMPLETED BY ARRIVAL OF THE TROOPS AT SPRINGFIELD ON JANUARY 13TH

ALTHOUGH the British attack had been repulsed at every point, the Boers, true to their defensive methods, made no attempt to pursue, and acceded next day to the demand of a twenty-four hours' armistice to be devoted to the collection of the wounded. On its expiration at midnight on the 16th, Buller's advanced troops retired still further to the south, and within a few days the entire force had settled down at Frere and Chieveley, Hildyard and Barton, with the cavalry and Naval guns, remaining at the latter, the Headquarters, Hart, and Lyttelton at the former. So situated, the troops rested for over three weeks, passing their Christmas in sports and jollity, and showing a disregard for the recent reverse and a cheery confidence in the future which astonished men accustomed to judge the moods and temper of armies.

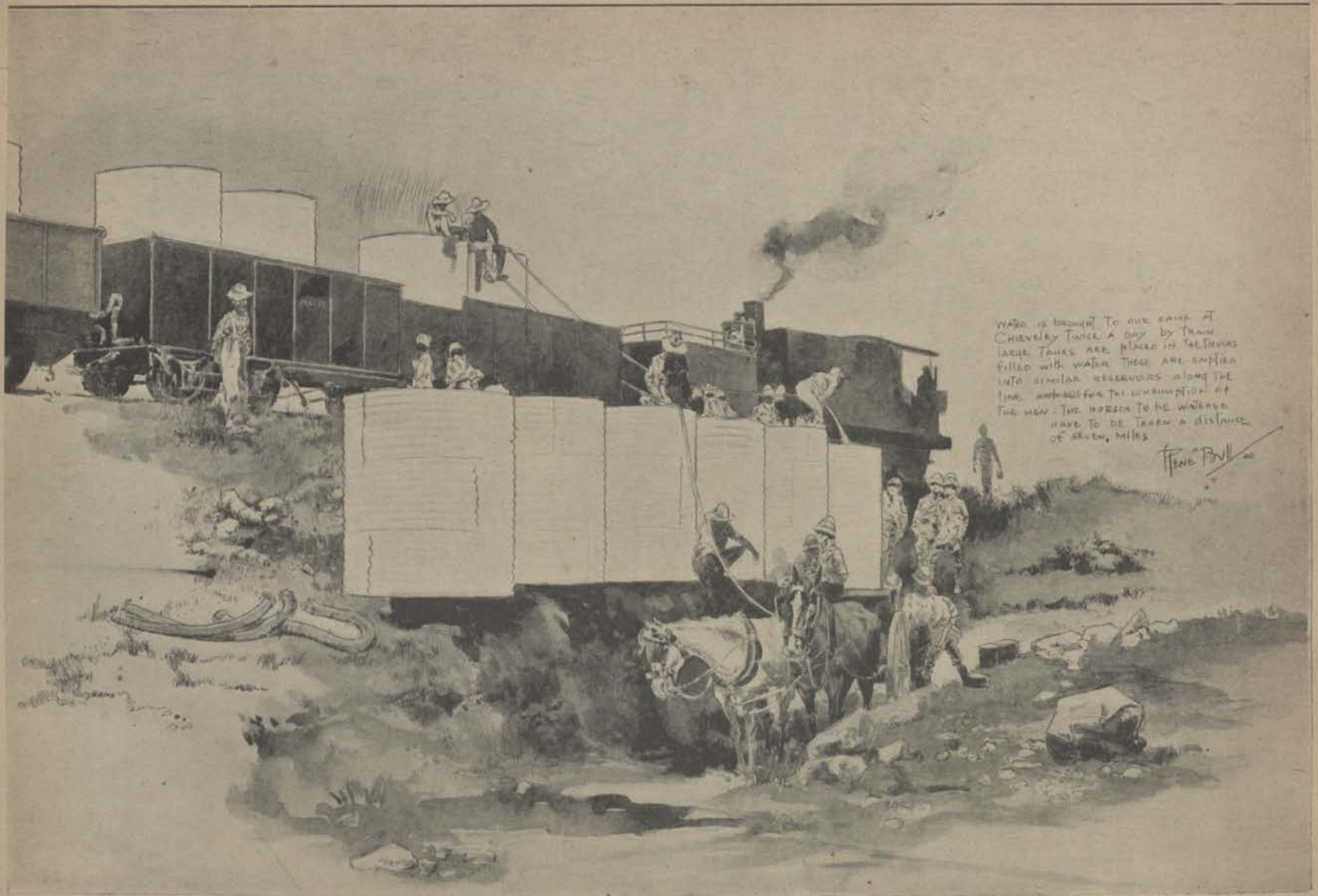
The general state of affairs remained the same. The enemy steadily strengthened their positions at Colenso and on Hlangwane, the bombardment of Ladysmith continued without seriously affecting the siege, and reinforcements and supplies from England slowly arrived at Durban. Day after day passed in small and generally bloodless affairs of outposts; and every day the Naval guns threw a few lyddite shells into the hostile positions, always frightening and

sometimes doing damage. Yet despite the want of incident, the three weeks made clear the great cardinal fact to which we owed our final victory, namely, that the enemy dared not attack except under extraordinarily favourable conditions. In spite of the sharp repulse at Colenso, Sir Redvers Buller still held in his own hand the deciding power of the offensive. He could still complete his preparations without molestation, and choose his own moment and point of attack, Ladysmith's power of resistance alone limiting him in point of time. As far as the army which stood between him and the garrison was concerned, it could do no more than it had done. And since, excepting the aggressiveness of a comparative small number of rebels, the same feature of impassive defence characterised the Dutch campaign in the other parts of South Africa, it was obvious that the resources of the Empire would have time to develop, and sooner or later decide the war.

Nevertheless, the anxiety for the first few days was extreme, and great was the relief when the 5th Division, under Sir Charles Warren, began to appear in Natal. In the meantime efforts were made to increase the mobility of the army, and by constant reconnaissances along the Tugela to supply the knowledge which want of proper maps and other means had before so disadvantageously limited.

The arrival of some dozen traction engines greatly facilitated the transport of the heavier stores. These so-called "steamers," which on good level ground drew a load of twelve tons at the rate of eight miles an hour, required less attention and took up less room than oxen, and were exceedingly valuable in dragging waggons through spruits or up steep banks. A balloon section had also come up, and large masses of stores and animals were accumulated in readiness for the next advance. There is good reason to believe that the slowness of the subsequent operations was due rather to the complicated and elaborate nature of the transport, and the enormous local difficulties it had to confront, rather than any want of foresight in collection or delay in transmittal.

Meanwhile the mounted troops worked hard and unceasingly along the Tugela. Frequent reconnaissances were pushed towards Springfield and Weenen, and in front of Colenso several attempts were made to


WATER IS BROUGHT TO OUR CAMP AT CHIEVELEY TWICE A DAY BY TRAIN LARGE TANKS ARE PLACED IN THE TRUCKS FILLED WITH WATER THESE ARE EMPTIED INTO SIMILAR RESERVOIRS ALONG THE LINE ANOTHER FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF THE MEN - THE HORSES TO BE WATERED HAVE TO BE TAKEN A DISTANCE OF SEVEN MILES

BRINGING WATER TO CHIEVELEY CAMP BY TRAIN

draw the enemy's fire and force him to disclose his positions. It cannot be said that these last operations were particularly successful, but they served to worry and perplex the Boers and so to intensify the strain which inevitably weighs upon the army of the defence. It was further bruited that our opponents were suffering considerably from want and disease, but their hardships were certainly not great enough to impair their energy. Round both our flanks they pushed their raiding parties. On the last day of December a Boer camp was located at Springfield, some sixteen miles on Buller's left where the little Tugela is bridged, and whence an advance to the upper drifts could be checked or observed. Colonel Parsons sighted fifty Boer waggons, but refrained from attacking for want of guns. About the same date Colonel Byng took the South African Light Horse to the junction of the Tugelas near Deel's Drift, and exchanged shots with Boers on the north bank of the larger stream. Similar reconnaissances were made towards the flanks of Hlangwane, where a Hussar patrol was one day captured. Some hope was aroused about December 29th, when the sudden rains had flooded the Tugela and broken the temporary bridge north of Hlangwane, that the Boers who occupied that hill would be cut off and destroyed, but, whatever the reason, nothing was done, and the river dropping, communication between the two portions of the Boer army was restored. A similar opportunity the day after the assault on Ladysmith was also allowed to pass. Either General Buller had made up his mind to strike elsewhere, or these chances were too fleeting to be utilised. His preparations were nearly completed, and rumours of a fresh advance were becoming certainties, when, on the morning of January 6th, the roar of a tremendous cannonade was heard in the direction of Ladysmith.

This is not the place to recount the incidents of the brilliant feat of arms by which the soldiers of Sir George White, already weakened by disease and hunger, flung back from their very bayonet points the most desperate assault ever attempted by a Boer army, and inflicted a defeat which in its moral and material loss wrought in the minds of the burghers like a sure omen of the coming ruin of their cause. We have here to deal with the movements of the Relief Column. During the

morning the thunder of the distant guns died away, but men still remained ignorant of what was passing. Then at midday came the first message of Sir George White, signifying that, though the first attack had been repulsed, fighting was still going on. Sir Redvers acted promptly. At 1 p.m. came the order to the force at Chieveley to turn out, and an hour later Hildyard's and Barton's brigades, preceded by the whole force of cavalry and supported by two field batteries and the Naval guns, were advancing in stately array towards Colenso. The

A PIECE OF LYDDITE SHELL FROM 5" HOWITZER. FOUND NEAR LADYSMITH

movement was but a demonstration, nor would it have been wise, or even possible, to push it further. It has been suggested that General Buller should have marched at once to Springfield or Weenen, passed the river, and fallen on the Boer flank. But supposing that the army was ready for such a movement, its execution would have required days, and by that time the fate of the town would have been decided. No doubt, whether Ladysmith had fallen or not, the assault offered the Relief Column a good opportunity of beginning a fresh advance, but as far as the garrison was concerned, a secret flank movement would have

availed nothing until perhaps it would have been too late. The only way in which Buller could immediately bring pressure to bear on the Boers was to threaten Colenso or Hlangwane. This he did with all the troops within call. To have endeavoured to force the Tugela late in the afternoon and in ignorance of the enemy's strength would have been to repeat on a yet more reckless scale the fault of December 15th.

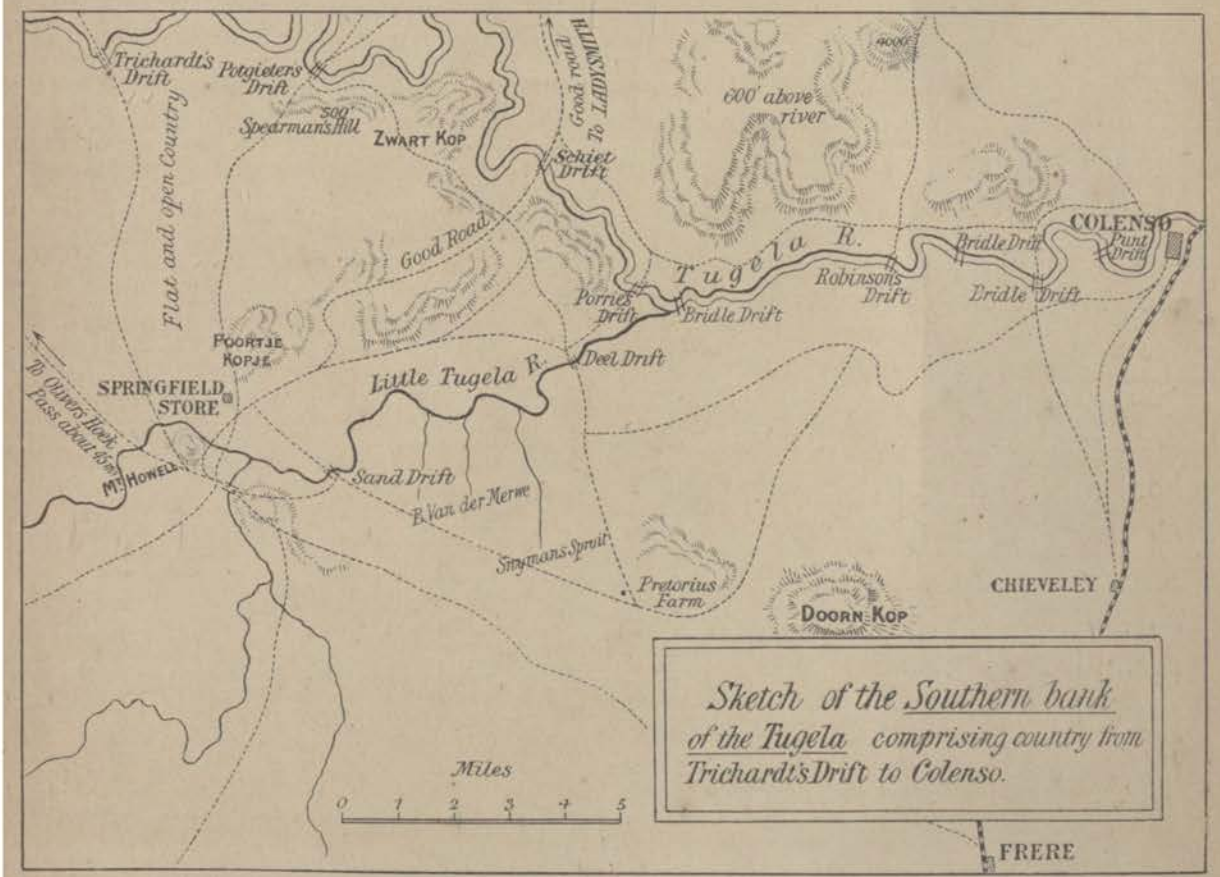
It was close on five o'clock when the infantry, having got within

MULES WITH AMMUNITION WAGGONS CROSSING A SPRUIT

rifle range, lay down, and the guns opened fire upon the Boer trenches. Just at this moment the storm which had so long hung over the sombre peaks of the Drakensberg burst in tropical violence upon the enemy's positions and far away over the hills upon the swaying struggle round Ladysmith. Had anything been needed to increase the ardour of Clery's artillerymen, it would have been the knowledge that that bombardment almost exactly coincided with the final act of that momentous fight. For while the flashes of the British shell mingled

with the glare of the lightning on the dark hills behind Colenso, the companies of the Devons, in the heart of the storm, were pushing on to victory on the summit of Cæsar's camp. Neither the attack nor the bombardment lasted long; the first met with rapid success, the last it was unprofitable to continue, and the night closed in upon Clery's slow retirement to Chieveley and the rout of the assailants of Ladysmith.

Not till next morning did the news of the result arrive, news which



MAP OF THE SOUTH BANK OF THE TUGELA

must have stirred the General to act at once while the depression of defeat still hung over Joubert's army. Orders to clear the hospitals had been issued on the 6th; by the 8th they had been obeyed, and 700 civilian stretcher-bearers, men who risked their lives for the good of the cause as boldly, and yet more unselfishly, than any soldier, had come up from the south. Warren's Division, which had reached Estcourt on the 7th, moved on the 9th to Frere. The extraordinarily heavy rain flooded all the water-courses, and rendered a march of

twelve or fourteen miles an affair of twelve hours. The artillery could hardly get their guns along the marshy tracks, and the infantry were stopped several hours at a spruit, and only succeeded in passing when the torrent abated. It was late in the afternoon when the columns reached Frere, and as they had marched without tents, they had to bivouac under heavy rain.

The force which Buller had now concentrated consisted of the troops who had fought at Colenso, together with the 14th Hussars, the 11th Brigade,[1] under Woodgate, three battalions[2] of the 10th with the Imperial Light Infantry under Coke, both belonging to the 5th Division; the Brigade Division R.A.[3] of the 5th Division, two batteries which had formed part of the original Corps Artillery, viz., 61st (howitzers) and the 78th (Field), and the 4th Mountain Battery. In all nearly six brigades of infantry, three regiments of regular cavalry, 1,500 mounted infantry, seven field batteries (excluding the 14th and 66th), one field howitzer and one mountain battery, with two 4·7 inch and a dozen 12-lb. Naval guns, amounting to 18,000 bayonets, nearly 3,000 horsemen, and seventy-two guns. The transport of the food supply alone required 650 ox waggons, each drawn by sixteen oxen, not to mention spare animals. Besides these there were 257 mule waggons, drawn by nearly 4,000 mules. To move the big 4·7 inch guns required, according to one account, sixty-four oxen, but this number was probably only necessary on steep or marshy ground. During the march the traction engines seem to have been utilised for disengaging those vehicles which jammed in the drifts. All the drivers and animals had, as well as the troops, to be fed by the military commissariat. And worst of all, they had to move in a country which possessed no macadamised roads, and in which the tracks were few, and rather lines of direction than in themselves an assistance to progress.

Sir Redvers Buller's plan was to move westward, cross the Little Tugela at Springfield, and then, turning north, seize some favourable point of passage, whether at Potgieter's Drift, or still further to the west,

[1] 2nd Royal Lancaster, 1st S. Lancashire, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Yorkshire and Lancashire.

[2] 2nd Dorsets, 2nd Middlesex, and 2nd Somersets.

[3] 19th and 28th Batteries.

where the hills on the south bank easily commanded the great angle of the Tugela and ensured a safe crossing. By this means he hoped to turn the Boer right either by a wide sweep near Acton Homes or a more

Photograph by] *[Elliott & Fry*

BRIGADIER-GENERAL THE HON. NEVILLE G. LYTTELTON, C.B.

direct advance, and seizing the mighty barrier four miles to the north of the river, descend eastward over the easier country behind it, thus threatening the rear of his enemies. Could the hill range be rapidly

secured, their lines of defence would become untenable, the retreat of the Free Staters threatened if not cut off, and the Transvaal army would either have to abandon the siege or fight a battle in a desperately dangerous position, White's victorious garrison in their rear and Buller descending on their front and flank. To accomplish this, great rapidity, boldness, and secrecy were essential. The distance to Potgieter's through Springfield was about twenty-five miles, and the country, once the hills commanding the Little Tugela were passed, comparatively open and easy.

It was determined that while Barton's Brigade — four Naval 12-pounders and part of the mounted infantry — covered the railway and the communications in an entrenched position before Colenso, Clery with Hart and Hildyard, and Warren with Lyttelton and Woodgate, should move on Springfield, preceded by Dundonald, who was to seize the bridge. Coke's battalions formed a corps brigade, and with the rest of the troops were to follow the movement.

Early in the morning of the 10th the march began. With four squadrons of the South African Light Horse, Lord Dundonald followed the baggage from Chieveley, until, a few miles to the west, he struck into the road by which Hart's Brigade was advancing from Frere. Then, riding to the head of the column, and leaving the slow and cumbrous trains behind, he pushed forward rapidly and reached Pretorius Farm, about half-way to Springfield, at midday.

Adding to his force Bethune's Mounted Infantry and a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, he started again, and without incident reached the Little Tugela. The bridge was unoccupied, and no Boers were to be seen. This was surprising, for a laager had been in the neighbourhood a few days before, and a strong opposition at the defile had been expected. Scouts were again sent out, and again could discover no enemy. Men suspected a ruse, for it appeared inconceivable that the Boers would leave a line so favourable for defensive purposes unguarded. Dundonald had carried out his orders, but a cavalry commander has more to do than obey the letter of a command given with a limited knowledge of the facts. His is at once the most independent and responsible position in the army excepting that of the general himself, and it is his business to interpret the latter's wishes

THE SEIZURE OF POTGIETER'S DRIFT

boldly and unhesitatingly. This, the only true principle of cavalry action, Dundonald admirably applied when, after a short halt at Springfield, he left 300 men and two field guns at the bridge, and wheeling northward with the rest, hurried on to Potgieter's Ferry. At 6 p.m. he reached the hill above it, which was found to be fortified but tenantless. The guns were dragged to the top, and there the little force, 700 men in all, passed an anxious night, for they were far from help, and might have fared ill had any large force of Boers been in a position to attack them. But the dark hours passed without alarm, and, except for the distant enemy now gathering thickly upon the heights of the northern bank, there was nothing to betoken danger. Next day six of the South African Light Horse, under Lieutenant Carlyle, swam the flooded stream and secured the punt, in spite of a sharp fire from an advanced party of Boers, who were lying in some low kopjes in the great bend of the river. On the 12th two of Lyttelton's battalions arrived to support the cavalry, after a forced march of nearly twenty miles.

The success achieved by Dundonald was well worth the risk. By his courage and energy an important passage of the river had been secured without losing a man, and a day had, in a sense, been gained. The fact that none of the enemy were south of the Tugela—for it was pretty certain that had there been any they would either have attacked the cavalry before the rest of the force arrived or retreated at once—must have enabled Buller to handle his infantry and baggage columns more boldly and securely than if he had felt uncertain as to Potgieter's Drift. The sudden dash with the cavalry was a really brilliant piece of work, and seemed to prelude a rapid and complete success. It was unfortunate that its advantages were nullified by a slowness of movement which, whether avoidable or not, will not easily find a rival amongst modern military records.

The same day that Dundonald marched to Potgieter's Drift the infantry brigades began their movement. Hildyard closed up to Hart, who had started from his camp two miles north of Frere, and, after reconnoitring the junction of the Tugelas, halted for the night at Pretorius Farm. Warren's Division, after experiencing great difficulty

Orderlies to be out of hearing of the Instrument
Military Telegraph Office
Military Telegraph office
Potgieters Drift
speaking To Frere by Telephone
Henri Boyll

THE MILITARY TELEGRAPH OFFICE AT POTGIETER'S DRIFT

in crossing the Blaauwkranz Drifts, where improvised bridges were used by the infantry, reached Springfield on the 12th. By the 13th all the troops, including the Naval Artillery, were in the neighbourhood of that place, or, in other words, they and the transport had succeeded in covering sixteen miles in three to four days. This was certainly due to the state of the roads and the mass of baggage. At three points between the railway and Springfield it was necessary to double or treble

PASSAGE OF INFANTRY OVER A BRIDGE OF WAGGONS.

span each waggon in succession, and nothing but the willingness of the troops and drivers could have overcome the difficulties. On the 15th the howitzers and Naval guns (eight 12-pounders and two 4·7 inch guns) arrived at Mount Alice or Spearman's Hill, which Dundonald had occupied.

So ended the first stage of the turning movement. At its commencement General Buller had appealed to the troops in an army order beginning, "We are going to the relief of our comrades in Ladysmith;

this time there must be no turning back," and going on to warn them against trusting to false bugle calls or to the white flag when shown by the enemy. They were advised only to give quarter when the latter threw up their hands. The General added that, if surprised at short range, the only way was to rush in with the bayonet, as this was the one form of combat in which the Boers were helpless. The proclamation had had an excellent effect, and the troops were burning to fight. Everything seemed to augur well for the final success of the operation. One important crossing was in General Buller's hands; his cavalry was scouting along the bank; the mass of his infantry was within a short march of the main points of passage. At one of these he had now to surprise the enemy, throw his army rapidly across, overwhelm all immediate resistance, and seize positions from whence he could compel the Boers either to abandon the line of the Tugela and Ladysmith or fight a battle in which defeat meant destruction.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST OPERATIONS OF WARREN

WHY THE BOERS HAD DESERTED THE SOUTH BANK OF THE TUGELA—THEIR NUMBERS—THEIR POSITIONS ON THE NORTHERN BANK—THEY ENTRENCH THEMSELVES RAPIDLY—EVENTS FROM THE 13TH TO 15TH—WARREN'S ORDERS—NIGHT MARCH, 16TH–17TH—LYTTELTON CROSSES AT POTGIETER'S DRIFT—WARREN AT TRICHARDT'S DRIFT—18TH, SKIRMISH AT ACTON HOMES—WAGGONS AND ARTILLERY OVER THE TUGELA—JANUARY 19TH—THE QUESTION OF ROUTE—WARREN DECIDES FOR THE SHORTER ROAD AND A FRONTAL ATTACK—CLERY'S ACTION ON THE 20TH—HOWITZERS ASKED FOR, 21ST—JANUARY 22ND, GUNS ARRIVE—WARREN RESOLVES TO ATTACK SPION KOP—ATTACK DELAYED—JANUARY 23RD, BULLER CALLS UPON WARREN TO ACT OR WITHDRAW—NIGHT ATTACK ON SPION KOP DECIDED ON

WHILE Buller's infantry were on the march to Springfield, his cunning and active enemies had hurried to the point of the threatened attack. Ever cautious, the Boers south of the river had withdrawn to the left bank when the stream became flooded, fearful of capture or defeat if they awaited the English advance in front of a raging torrent. Hence Dundonald's success and the unexpected ease with which the first part of the operations was completed. The whole of the Boer force, with the exception of those required to maintain the investment of Ladysmith, was now fast concentrating on the hills to the north of Potgieter's Drift. As early as Friday, the 12th, commandos had been seen in movement upon the northern heights, and from the 13th to the 15th large parties were engaged in entrenching and fortifying every hillslope and ravine for miles along the range of Spion Kop to Vaalkranz, and yet further eastward towards the Colenso ridges. So thickly did the Boers cluster along the mountain-sides that one account [1] speaks of some 10,000 men at work. Whatever the real number of Boers engaged in the defence of the hills, it was estimated at not less than 11,000, for other com-

[1] Bennett Burleigh. See below.

mandos had recently arrived from the frontier of the Free State, and the enemy's strength in Natal at the commencement of the war was probably above 20,000 men. Including the force necessarily left at Colenso and on Hlangwane, Joubert and Botha may have had some 12,000 men in front of Buller.[1] The positions that they occupied were extraordinarily strong and together with the points of passage, require a short description.

Westward of the junction of the Tugelas, we have first Porries Drift, where a track passing to the north bank joins the road which runs along the river from Colenso. This drift, like the Bridle Drift, east of the river-junction, is commanded by high hills on the north bank. The next point of passage is Skiet Drift, more than three miles to the north-west. A good road coming from Springfield crosses the ridge on the southern bank, and runs almost due north on the further side between the river and the Dornkloof heights towards the Vaalkranz hill. When close under this it turns north-east, and passing over fairly flat country, runs between Middle Hill and Lancer's Hill into Ladysmith. The entire distance from the Tugela is about sixteen miles, and the Vaalkranz kopjes are about four miles north of the drift. But before this road could be safely used it would be necessary to clear that ridge as well as the hills which lie on the right flank of any force advancing from the river.

We now come to the most eastern of two great river loops, which we may call the Zwartkop loop from the hill which stood in its base. From the top of Zwartkop, now in our possession, to the head of the bend is about three miles. The ground contained in the loop is flat and open, and its extremity is completely commanded by the Vaalkranz and Brakfontein kopjes.

[1] This was the general computation before General Louis Botha's remarkable statement to Mr. Michael Davitt was published (see *Freeman's Journal*, July 10). According to this he had only 3,000 men with which to defend the whole line from Acton Homes to Spion Kop, compensating for his inferiority of numbers by rapid movements which led the British to over-estimate his force. The story is not so improbable as at first sight appears. Cronje's numbers turned out ultimately to be far less than Lord Methuen had believed, while in opposition to the exaggerated estimates of 80–100,000 Boers at the front we have the several times repeated statement that there were never more than 30–35,000 in line at the same moment. (See Chap. I. p. 18.)

Three miles westward from Zwartkop, or, as it is sometimes called, Intabamnyana, is Potgieter's Drift. As already mentioned, it lies at the south-western extremity of one of the numerous loops, the tongue of land on which the Ladysmith road debouches being dominated by the steep heights on the south bank, called Spearman's Hill and Mount Alice. About a mile from the drift is a line of small, reddish kopjes, from which Lieutenant Carlyle had been fired on while he was engaged in securing the punt. Beyond these kopjes the ground is open and rises gently until it abuts against a semicircle of hills, over which pass the roads towards Maria's Hovel and Arnot Hill Farm.

On the east of the cirque are Vaalkranz and Kranzkloof, and nearer the centre Brakfontein, which is connected with Jantje's Hill, part of the Spion Kop range, by the lower ridges near Wessel's Farm. From the drift to these hills is from three to four miles, and there is no adequate cover after the small, red kopjes, which form a kind of bridge-head to the crossing, are left behind. Any troops moving along the roads would come under a frontal and cross-fire, to which they could return no effective reply. Potgieter's Drift, therefore, though a valuable point gained, offered no reasonable chance of forcing the Boer positions in its front, until their flank had been turned elsewhere.

Westward of the Potgieter's loop comes the second of the great bend, which, as it lies close under Spion Kop, we may call the Spion Kop loop. Westward again along the river the country is flat and open for three miles; and then the western spurs of Spion Kop run down to within a few hundred yards of the bank near Waggon Drift and Trichardt's Drift, five miles, or a little more, from Potgieter's. Less than two miles from Trichardt's, Venter's Spruit falls into the Tugela, and five miles to the north-west, in almost a direct line along the torrent bed, lie the woods of Acton Homes. Yet seven miles to the south-west the Honger's Poort road crosses the river on its way to the Tintwa, or Bezuidenhout's Pass, eighteen miles distant. The bridge had been broken by the Boers on January 13th.

The road from Trichardt's Drift leads to Acton Homes, from which

Photograph by] *[Elliott & Fry*

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR CHARLES WARREN, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

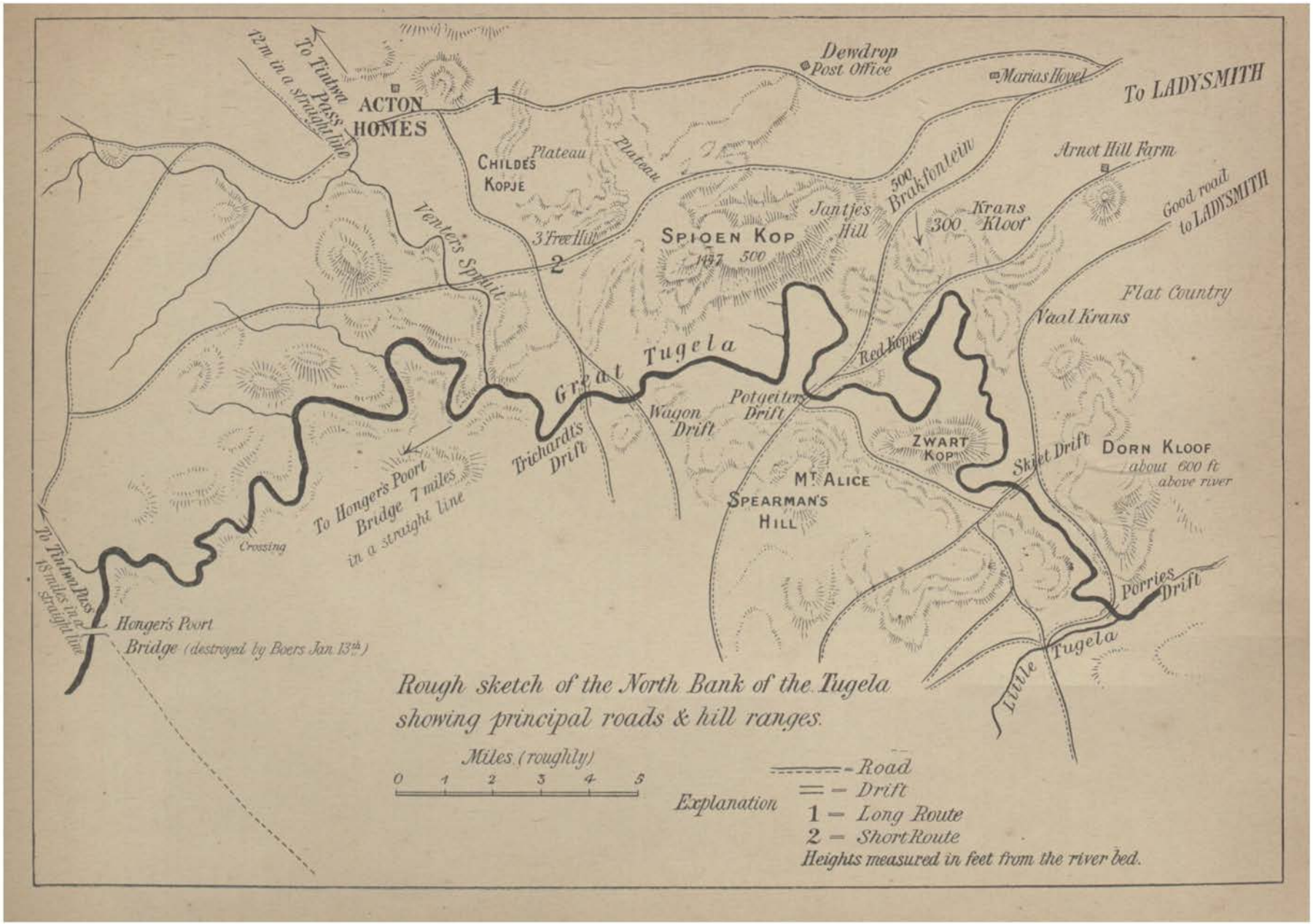
the Bezuidenhout road runs through Dewdorp to Ladysmith, and completely turns the Spion Kop range, though it is commanded by hills east and west of Acton Homes. A more southern route goes between Three Tree Hill and Spion Kop, crosses the open country near Maria's Farm, and descends over Lancer's Nek. The length of the route by Acton Homes is about twenty-five miles, that by Three Tree Hill about twenty-one and a half.[1] The Spion Kop ridge bends back from the confluence of Venter's Spruit with the Tugela as far as Acton Homes, where the hills become slightly lower. Between these two points the country is extremely rugged and presents a continuous line of heights, sinking in a series of steps towards Trichardt's Drift and the bank of the spruit, and offering successive lines of defence one above the other. Spion Kop itself, which is at an angle formed by the southern and south-western faces of the mountain is the highest point, and stands 4,800 feet above sea-level.[2]

Generally speaking, then, the line of defence that Buller had to force consisted of an unbridged and dangerous river, passable only at the drifts, some of which were commanded by the hills on the opposite bank. The further shore consisted of flat or broken ground rising into precipitous heights, which were either too far away to be effectively bombarded from the British positions, or, as in the case of Spion Kop, overlooked them. It was impossible to move anywhere in the direct front of the enemy without suffering from a heavy converging fire. From Skiet's to Trichardt's Drift, a line of about eleven miles, the northern bank showed the bastions and re-entering angles of a natural fortress, which it was but necessary to man to make impregnable, and which could only be taken by days of fighting or by surprise.

It was obvious that a frontal attack would involve heavy loss, even if it succeeded, and that a decisive victory could only be gained by striking at the enemy's flank or rear. The whole march to Springfield, essentially a flank movement, would be stultified by a battle fought upon the lines of Colenso. General Buller therefore adhered

[1] It is a pity that these two roads are not more clearly defined in the maps at present published. The above distances can only be regarded as approximate.

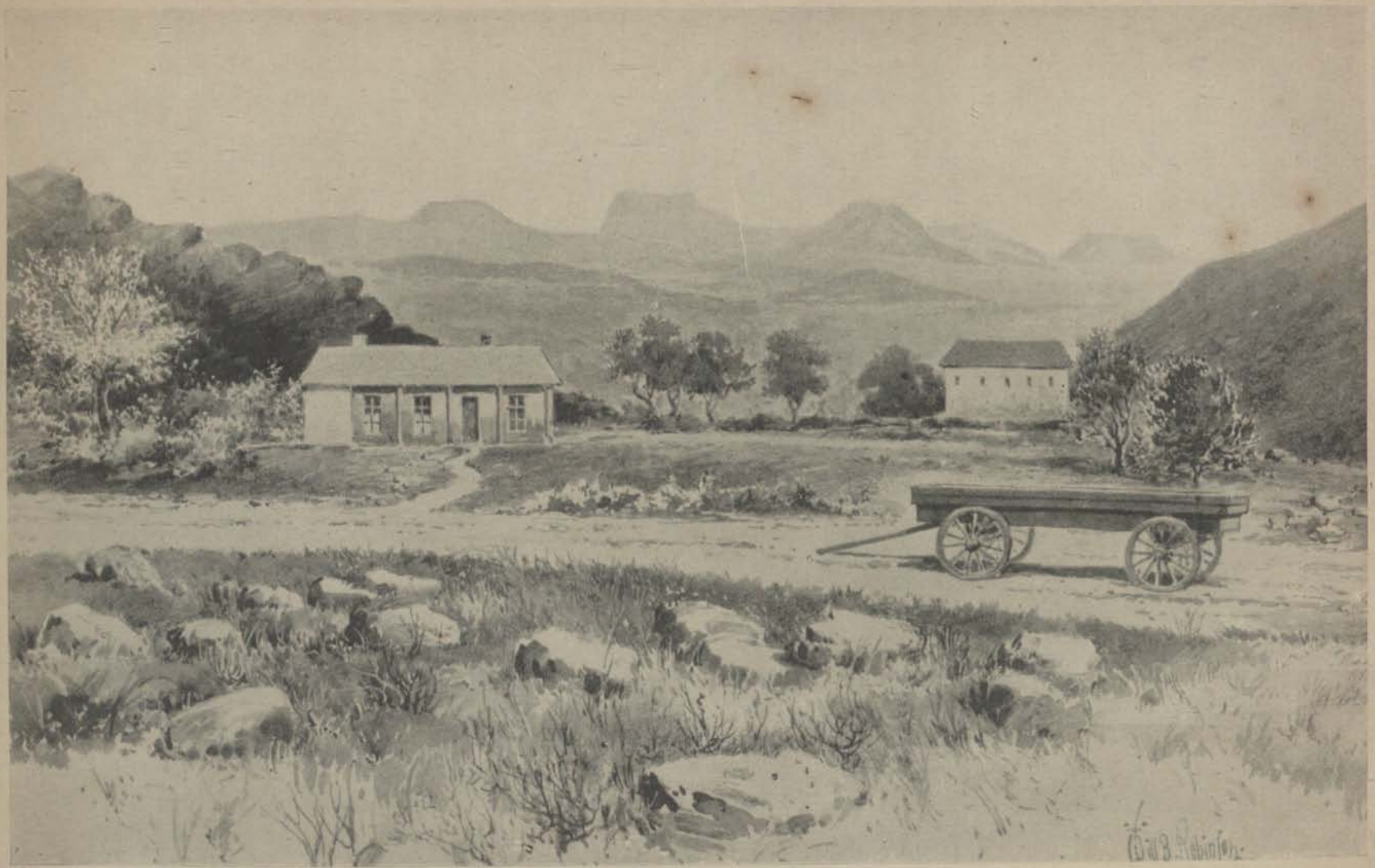
[2] Acton Homes is 4,200 feet high; the hill plateau varies between 4,000 and 4,500 feet.


To Tintwa Pass 12m in a straight line
ACTON HOMES
1
Dewdrop Post Office
Marias Hovel
To LADYSMITH
Plateau
Plateau
CHILDES KOPJE
Arnot Hill Farm
500
Brakfontein
Jantjes Hill
300
Krans Kloof
Good road to LADYSMITH
Venters Spruit
3 Free Hills
2
SPIOEN KOP
1437
500
Flat Country
Vaal Krans
Red Kopjes
Great Tugela
Wagon Drift
Potgeiters Drift
Trichardts Drift
ZWART KOP
Skiet Drift
DORN KLOOF
about 600 ft above river
To Hongers Poort Bridge 7 miles in a straight line
MT ALICE
SPEARMAN'S HILL
Crossing
To Tintwa Pass 18 miles in a straight line
Porries Drift
Hongers Poort Bridge (destroyed by Boers Jan 13th)
Little Tugela
Rough sketch of the North Bank of the Tugela showing principal roads & hill ranges.
Miles (roughly)
0 1 2 3 4 5
Explanation
Road
Drift
1 – Long Route
2 – Short Route
Heights measured in feet from the river bed.

to his original plan, namely, to turn the enemy's right, cut the Free Staters from their base, and with a great encircling sweep fling the Boer army off the hills and back upon Ladysmith.

This decided on, the English General had two things to do. He had firstly to locate the enemy's position accurately, especially that of their right flank against which he intended to manœuvre; secondly, to throw himself upon the chosen point with all possible speed and with every available man and gun.

We do not know what information General Buller had when he started from Frere, or how far the cavalry were able to supply him with intelligence after their arrival on the Tugela on January 11th. The maps were inaccurate, nor is it certain that their defects had been supplemented to any great extent by reconnaissances. The south bank of the Tugela, from Colenso to Potgieter's Drift, had been reconnoitred by Captain Hubert Gough, 16th Lancers, A.D.C. to Lord Dundonald, on November 29th, but it is questionable whether the country west of the drift had been similarly surveyed before December 15th, and after the repulse at Colenso, satisfactory map-making became a dangerous and difficult task, for the Boers soon grew uneasy as to the safety of their right, and pushed parties to Springfield and along the Little Tugela to stop further access to the upper waters of the larger river. It seems most probable that Sir Redvers' first intention was to cross at Potgieter's, but that, when on the morning of the 13th, he rode on to Spearman's Hill and examined the enemy's disposition in his front, he saw that the Boers, thanks to their mobility and the shorter distance, had forestalled him, and resolved to seek a passage further to the west. All along he must have contemplated the possibility of finding himself outpaced, in which case Potgieter's was still a valuable acquisition as providing him with a crossing or an opportunity for a feint, as indeed actually happened. No detailed account of the operations of the cavalry on the 12th has reached us, but it was reported at the time that they reconnoitred the enemy's position on the morning of Sir Redvers' arrival and ascertained that the enemy was strongly entrenched on the Brakfontein kopjes, and towards Spion Kop. No mention of a reconnaissance further to the west has, so far as we know, appeared, but we may fairly



SPEARMAN'S FARM, LOOKING WEST TOWARDS ACTON HOMES

Our first headquarters beyond the Tugela

suppose that Lord Dundonald was able to give his chief some information as to the higher drifts and whether the Boers had occupied them or not. This is an important point, for as the success of the operations depended upon the rapidity with which they were executed, it was essential that General Buller should know at the earliest possible moment how far the enemy had extended his right and whether the drifts west of Spion Kop were suitable for the passage of a large force. As far, indeed, as can be gathered from the despatch the delay which followed was not due to any uncertainty on these points, but to the want of supplies, and until, in the judgment of the General, sufficient had been collected, it was of course useless to issue orders.

Thus from the 13th to 15th no general movement was made. Day after day the troops on Spearman's Hill watched the enemy extending and strengthening their trenches and redoubts, and except that Colonel Byng, with some squadrons of South African Light Horse, demonstrated near the junction of the Tugelas, partly, no doubt, in order to divert the enemy's attention from the true point of attack, nothing worthy of mention was done.

Not till the 15th, though at what hour is not stated, did Sir Charles Warren receive his chief's commands. He was ordered "as soon as supplies were all in" to cross the Tugela near Trichardt's drift and "recommended" (to use the exact words of his despatch) to refuse his right opposite Spion Kop and "bring his left forward to gain the open plain north of Spion Kop." The 10th Brigade under Coke was to move to Spearman's Hill. "I was provided with four days' rations with which I was to cross the Tugela, fight my way round to north of Spion Kop and join your column opposite Potgieter's."[1] With Warren were to go the brigades of Hart, Hildyard, and Woodgate, six batteries[2] of the Field Artillery, and Dundonald's Cavalry, Regular and Irregular. With Lyttelton at Potgieter's Drift remained his own brigade, Coke's three battalions,[3] the naval guns, the howitzers, one field battery, and Bethune's

[1] Warren's despatch, Hatting Farm, January 29, 1900.

[2] 7th, 19th, 28th, 63rd, 73rd, 78th.

[3] Coke moved later to Zwartkop, and part of Bethune's Horse to Skiet Drift to watch the course of the river.

WAGGONS CROSSING POTGIETER'S DRIFT

Horse. As nearly as we can judge the relative numbers of the three parts of Buller's force, allowance being made for losses at Colenso, were as follows :—

Warren, nearly 10,000 infantry, 1,600 cavalry, and 36 guns, in all perhaps, 13,000 strong; Lyttelton, nearly 5,500 infantry, 300 cavalry, and 22 guns, some 6,500 strong; Barton, at Colenso, 3,000 infantry, 4 guns and some mounted infantry, total, 3,500; total, 23,000 men.

Warren took a day to make his arrangements for a supply of food and started from Springfield late in the afternoon of the 16th with his infantry and artillery. At 5.30 p.m. on the same afternoon Dundonald mustered his horsemen, each man carrying five days' rations and 150 rounds and moved west from Spearman's Hill, the tents being left standing to deceive the enemy. Early in the evening he reached Trichardt's Drift, and during the night the infantry also arrived and bivouacked on the bank of the Tugela. No attempt was made to pass or to build bridges that night, partly, it is to be supposed, out of consideration for the fatigue of the infantry, partly because the opposite bank had not been fully reconnoitred.

Meanwhile on the right, Lyttelton had also advanced. Before Dundonald had left his camp, the light brigade moved round the base of Mount Alice, and then extending into open order, pressed down to Potgieter's Drift. It had been intended to use the ferry as well as the ford, but it appears that there was considerable delay in getting the former to work, and in the interval the infantry had begun to cross. It was a hazardous task, for Potgieter's is one of the most dangerous drifts in Natal. According to one personally acquainted with it, the passage to the water's edge lies down a very steep and broken bank about forty feet high. Even when low the stream runs nearly four feet deep and very fast, and its breadth is about 100 yards. The line of the ford makes an angle up-stream, and just below it the bed-rock breaks off and forms a short fall. At the time of Lyttelton's passage the crossing was marked by several protruding boulders and mudbanks.

Led by two privates, who bravely plunged into the water and succeeded in reaching the opposite bank, the men linked hands and

THE FIRST CROSSING OF THE TUGELA BY LYTTELTON'S BRIGADE AT POTGIETER'S DRIFT ON JANUARY 16

in a chain forced their way across. Sometimes the line broke and men were barely saved from drowning. Nevertheless no casualties occurred. The first companies lined the northern banks and when sufficiently reinforced advanced in skirmishing order towards the reddish kopjes less than a mile from the drift; others followed in support and occupied the low ridge before dark, the enemy contenting themselves with a few rifle shots and evacuating their shelter trenches at our approach. Not till 6 p.m. did the engineers with the help of some Bluejackets get the ferry into working order and transport the remainder of the infantry to the aid of their comrades. By half-past three on the morning of the 17th, the howitzers, field battery, and waggons, were over the river, and two hours later the whole of the naval artillery from Mount Alice was raining shell upon the Boer trenches on Brakfontein and Spion Kop. At 6.15 the howitzers also opened fire, and as the lyddite burst among the trenches the Boers left their labours and fled for shelter. No gun attempted to reply or could be located. Lyttelton contented himself with holding the natural bridge-head formed by the reddish kopjes, and having satisfactorily established himself on the enemy's bank, halted to await the progress of Warren.

On the morning of the 17th that General, after ascertaining from his scouts that the ground near Trichardt's Drift was clear of the enemy, gave orders for the passage to commence. At 8 a.m. the movement began, the West Yorkshires and the Devons taking up a position on the southern bank, and the whole of the Field Artillery vigorously shelling the woods on the lower slopes of the opposite hills. The few Boer patrols retired, the Yorkshires crossed on pontoons, and in an hour half of Hildyard's brigade had reached the woods lately shelled, Hart's men had arrived, and the bridge-building was in progress. By 11 a.m. the pontoon bridge, eighty-five yards long, was finished, and the remaining infantry, including Woodgate's battalions, began to cross. A second trestle bridge was thrown in the afternoon, and the slow process of bringing over the guns and baggage began. About 1.30 p.m. the cavalry passed at the Waggon Drift, losing a trooper of the 13th Hussars, who was drowned. The whole of the day and the following night were consumed in getting the force across, and beyond occupying

THE FIFTH DIVISION CROSSING THE TUGELA ON THE WAGGON DRIFT PONTOON BRIDGE

the woods already mentioned nothing was done. Next morning there was a further delay. The transit of the artillery and waggons appears to have met with unexpected difficulties. At any rate, Sir Charles Warren refused to attempt anything until the whole of his artillery was across. By nightfall the guns had reached Wright's Farm and the infantry had advanced about two miles, covered by a line of cavalry posts along the lower kopjes north and north-east of the drifts, the right towards the lower spurs of Spion Kop, the left five miles in the direction of Acton Homes. The Boers, who had been able thoroughly to overlook the whole of the operation, were now busily entrenching upon the heights on Warren's right front.

Meanwhile on the left a sharp engagement was in progress. Some time after 2 p.m. Graham's composite regiment on the outer flank of the cavalry line had noticed a party of the enemy moving towards Acton Homes with the intention of observing or counteracting our movements in the direction of Tintwa road. To the westward[1] of the farm is a hill which commands the road, and was consequently important to both parties. The two opposing columns were over two miles apart when they first sighted each other. Recognising the value of the hill they raced for its possession. The Natal Carbineers arrived first, closely followed by the Imperial Light Horse and the Mounted Infantry Company of the 60th Rifles. Quickly getting into cover on the ridge they awaited the oncoming of the Boers who, misled as they affirmed by their patrols, had not noticed the advance of the Carbineers, and rode up in full view of the crest behind which the British lay ensconced. Their main body, about 200 strong, was scarcely 300 yards away, and their scouts had almost ridden into the ambush, when the concealed troopers opened a heavy fire,[2] killed and wounded about thirty, and drove the rest to cover or off the field. Those who remained kept up a hot fusillade, which lasted throughout the afternoon. The British riflemen strove to gain their flank and rear, the Boers to escape. Ever and anon one of the latter would make a dash for safety, pursued and

[1] Warren's despatch January 18th, 7.15 p.m. The *Times* correspondent placed it several miles E.N.E. of Acton Homes.

[2] Mr. Bennett Burleigh implies that the action was prematurely begun by an excited trooper of the Imperial Light Horse.

sometimes attained a shower of bullets that churned up the dust about his galloping pony. But as reinforcements came in from Dundonald and Warren the chances of retreat grew slighter. Lieutenant Barnes, spurring in hot haste to the southward, brought news of the skirmish, and his call for help was answered first by the South African Light Horse and later by a detachment from the Dragoons. Steadily the ring of environment curved in round the remaining enemy, and a hail of bullets swept the rocks behind which they had taken shelter. As the evening closed in a section of the 60th Rifles tried to reach them with the bayonet, but were forced to retire, leaving two of their number shot through the head. Again and again the white flag was raised, only to be followed by renewed firing when our men showed themselves. At length the resistance ceased, and in dead silence three Boers rose and held up their hands in token of surrender. Twenty-four were taken, and Mr. de Mentz, the Field Cornet of Heilbronn, was amongst the dead. He had been wounded in the leg, but refused to surrender, and fighting doggedly till his strength failed had died of hemorrhage, his wife's letter clasped in his hand and his face set in grim resolve, a type of Boer hatred against the Englishman. On our side two men had been killed, and one man and one officer of the Imperial Light Horse wounded. Captain Shore was the twenty-third officer of that regiment hit within the short space of three months.[1]

At Potgieter's Lyttelton's Brigade demonstrated imposingly during the afternoon, the Rifle battalions advancing in attack formation to within a mile of the Brakfontein entrenchments, and the heavy artillery pouring a sharp fire of shell upon the Boer works. No reply was elicited from the enemy, and at nightfall the troops withdrew to the red kopjes (called "One Tree Hill") with the loss of two men wounded by rifle shots. So ended the 18th.

The chief events of the next day, contrary to general expectation, were the occupation by two infantry brigades of the slopes of the adjoining hills on the right and the safe conveyance of the waggons to Venter's Spruit. Over the spruit a bridge was thrown,[2] presumably for the waggons, as in the case of a flank march round Spion Kop these

[1] Winston Churchill. [2] "The Relief of Ladysmith" (J. B. Atkins).

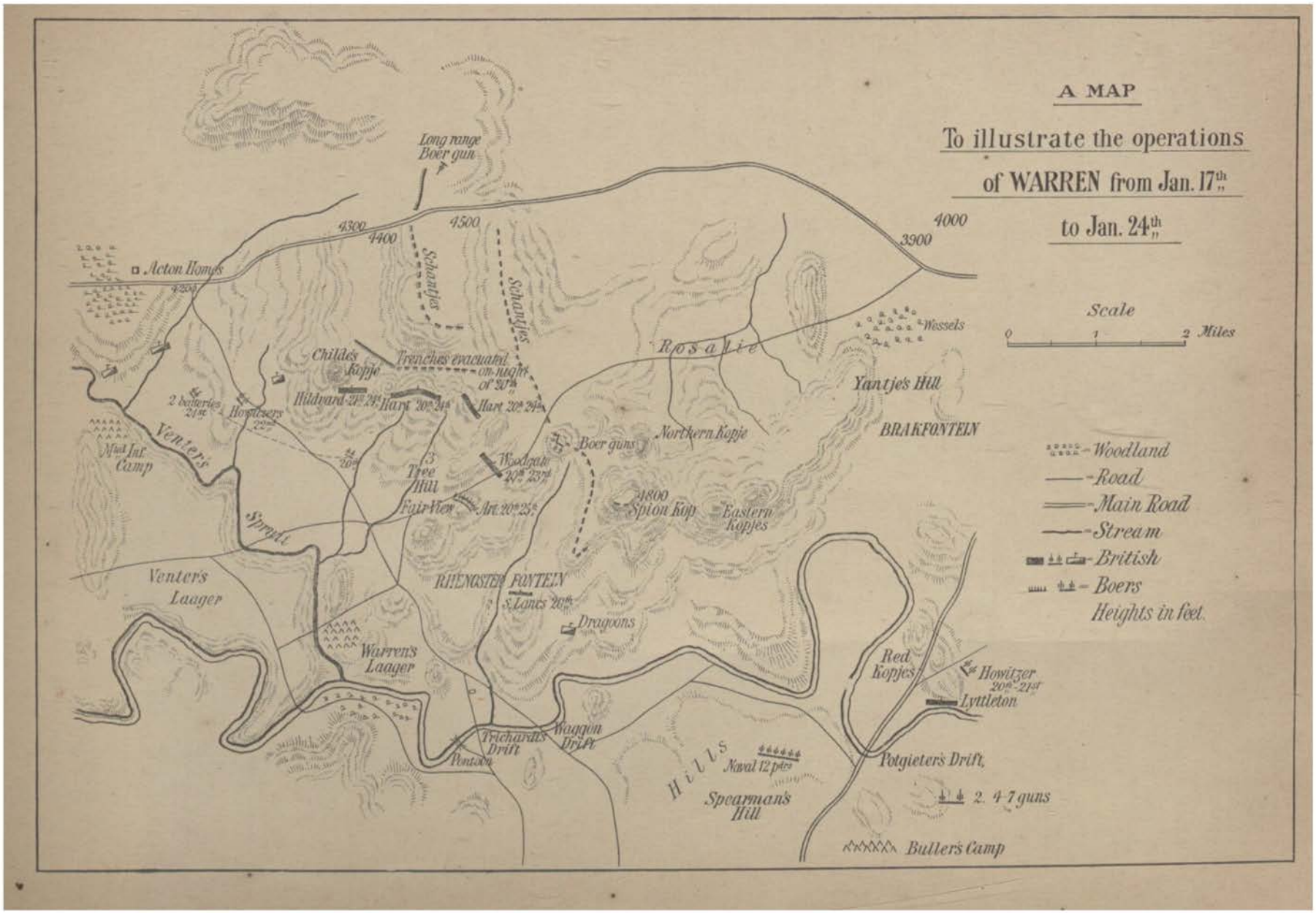
would naturally move with an escort on the outer or left flank of the troops, so as to be out of reach of the enemy. If this were not done the circular movement would be both cumbrous and dangerous. The advance of the infantry on to the lower spurs of the ridge held by the Boers, which covered the cross march of the baggage to Venter's Spruit was the first step of a northward movement, for it should be remembered that on the morning of the 19th Sir Charles Warren did not intend to attack the ridge directly but to turn it.

In the course of the day, however, he reconnoitred the road to Acton Homes, and also that running between Three Tree Hill and Fair View across the centre of the enemy's position. From this examination he concluded, with the concurrence of his Staff, that want of time[1] made the former route impossible, and that the only way to relieve Ladysmith was by forcing the more southern road by a direct attack. The movement northward was stopped at midday, and the mounted infantry, against whom Sir George White had reported that a large Boer commando was moving, were recalled from the position they had captured.[2] In thus abandoning the northern route General Warren greatly modified the first plan of his superior, and considerably lessened his chances of decisively beating the enemy. He was about to assault positions so strong and extensive that the Boers, even if compelled to evacuate them, could effect a safe retreat, whereas, if he had succeeded in reaching Acton Homes with his main body, he would have gained a country more favourable to an assailant, and a point strategically more dangerous to the defendants.

Shortly before 8 o'clock on the evening of the 19th General Warren informed Sir Redvers of his intentions, intimating that as the Fair View route was "a very difficult road for a large number of waggons, unless the enemy was thoroughly cleared out," he was going to adopt some special arrangements which would involve his stay at Venter's Laager for two or three days. He added that he would send in for further supplies and report progress. The Commander-in-chief, who had been present at the passage of the Tugela on the 17th, replied that three days' supply was being sent, and awaited further developments.

[1] See below Chap. XIX., and also § 6 of Sir Charles Warren's despatch of January 29th.

[2] B. Burleigh.


A MAP
To illustrate the operations
of WARREN from Jan. 17th
to Jan. 24th
Scale
0 1 2 Miles
Woodland
Road
Main Road
Stream
British
Boers
Heights in feet.
Long range Boer gun
4300
4400
4500
4000
3900
Acton Homes
4250
Schantjes
Schantjes
Wessels
Rosalie
Childs Kopje
Trenches evacuated on night of 20th
Yantjes Hill
BRAKFONTEIN
2 batteries 21st
Howitzers 22nd
Hildyard 21st 24th
Hart 20th 24th
Hart 20th 24th
Mud Int. Camp
Venter's
Boer guns
Northern Kopje
3 Tree Hill
Woodgate 20th 23rd
Fair View
Art. 20th 25th
4800
Spion Kop
Eastern Kopjes
Sprutt
Venter's Laager
RHENOSTER FONTEIN
S. Lancs 20th
Dragoons
Warren's Laager
Red Kopjes
Howitzer 20th 21st
Lyttleton
Trichardt's Drift
Waggon Drift
Pontoon
HILLS
Naval 12 pdrs
Potgieter's Drift
Spearman's Hill
2. 4-7 guns
Buller's Camp

What the special arrangements referred to were have not been made known to the public, nor does it appear that Sir Redvers was better informed. Outwardly General Warren's plans took the shape of a general attack on the Boer lines the day after the above-mentioned despatch was sent in.

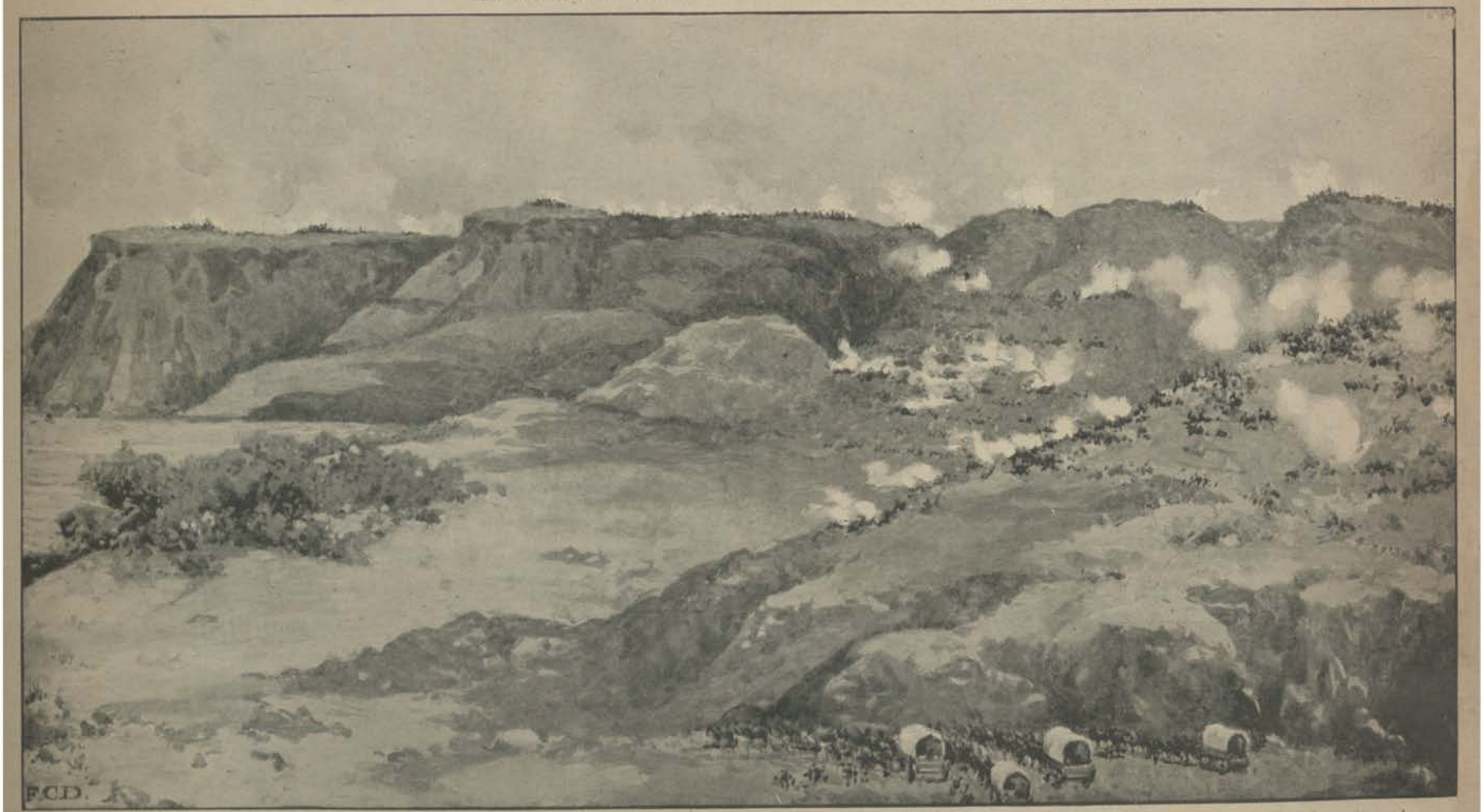
These positions consisted of a vast and irregular mass of hill, the main features of which can only be indicated very roughly. A few hundred yards below Trichardt's Drift a stream falls into the Tugela whose source is high up in the great south-westerly hollow or cwm (to use a Welsh expression) of Spion Kop. The western flank of this hollow is formed of a broad stony ridge, the lower spurs of which, running south and south-west, fill the space between the smaller stream, Venter's Spruit, and the Tugela. The higher part of this ridge abuts on the main mountain beyond Three Tree Hill, and the road Warren intended to open runs up its backbone between that eminence and Fair View Kopje. The distance from Coventry's Farm to the northern end of Three Tree Hill is about two miles. North of this central kopje are a series of other rough slopes about a mile across, bounded to the north by a steep front nearly two miles long, the western buttress of which, jutting out into the plain, came to be known as Bastion Hill, or Childe's Kopje. The plateau which these heights support is crossed by other ranges of kopjes running north and north-west, and forming further lines of defence in case Bastion Hill and the slopes of the great semi-circular basin, of which Three Tree Hill is the centre, should be forced.

From the ridges north-east of Bastion Hill and Three Tree Hill, and along the eastern flank of the cwm ran line upon line of trenches and stone walls. Every commanding point giving a good field of fire was prepared for defence. For days Boer and Kaffir had toiled at the work, and on the morning of the 20th everything was ready. In an ascending scale of difficulty each ridge and crest was jagged with schantzes, and when the edge of the plateau was reached, smooth glacis absolutely bare of cover and yielding a perfect field for the far-ranging Mauser bullet, led up to the final lines of the enemy along the kopjes that overlooked the tableland. Further back were placed the Boer guns, seven or eight in number, some of which, it is said, were the

First line of the Boer rifle trenches

British advancing with Maxims up-hill

Boer guns behind pits



Ambulances

Two Batteries R.A.

K. O. Lancasters and Lancashire Fusiliers sniping

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF SIR REDVERS BULLER'S ACTION ON JANUARY 20 AFTER CROSSING THE TUGELA

15-pounders taken at Colenso. Throughout the fighting their position was constantly altered, so that it was impossible for our field guns to locate them.

Warren's plan of attack appears to have been the following. He intended to pivot on his right, which would serve to contain the Boers on Spion Kop and protect his communications; and with his left to force the right and centre of their semicircular position, threatening their retreat and compelling them to withdraw from the Spion Kop massif altogether. The two salient points in the hostile defences, Three Tree Hill and Bastion Hill, he resolved, as a preliminary, to seize, but especially the former, which could be reached by his artillery and would allow of the development of a powerful line of guns in a position which partially admitted of an enfilading fire.

The operations on the 19th, to which we have already referred, had resulted in the seizure of several outlying kopjes with insignificant loss. From these Clery moved north-eastward with the brigades of Hildyard and Hart and the six batteries of field artillery before daylight on the morning of the 20th. Hildyard was on the left; Hart considerably advanced, and strengthened by the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and the 1st York and Lancaster Regiment from Woodgate's brigade, was in the centre; the latter with his two remaining battalions on the right. His right again was covered by the regular cavalry which faced towards Spion Kop, and guarded the bridges. On Hildyard's left marched Dundonald's mounted infantry. Hart was to commence the attack by occupying Three Tree Hill. Dundonald was ordered to seize Bastion Hill if it could be done without heavy loss.

At 3 a.m. the force started. Woodgate's two battalions, the 2nd South Lancashires and the 1st Lancaster deployed to the right and occupied Three Tree Hill, Hart's six battalions being massed on their left. After a most arduous ascent four batteries[1] got into position upon Three Tree Hill,[2] the other two remaining on the plain to the left. At

[1] 13th, 63rd, 7th, and 78th.—Bennett Burleigh.

[2] *I.e.*, to the left of the road. Some maps place the batteries on Fair View Kopje itself to the right of the road, but the former was a more commanding and therefore a more likely position.

7 a.m. they opened fire upon the long lines of schantzes which dotted every crestline and were the only visible sign of the enemy's presence. Not till 7.30, when the South Lancashires occupied a kopje to the east of the artillery position did the Boers reply, when a heavy musketry fire burst upon the infantry. It was not in this quarter, however, that the day was to be decided. To the left of the guns General Hart was now gathering his troops, the Lancashire men in the first line, his Irish battalions in reserve. His way lay up a long rough ridge broken with dongas and kopjes and strewn with boulders. Not till 11 a.m. did he receive orders to advance, and then with one mighty impulse the splendid troops he commanded bounded forward to the attack. With great rapidity and energy the solid battalions opened out into thin sprays of men, and rushing from cover to cover sped swiftly up the hill. With crash of rifle fire and rattle of Maxim the brown lines glided onwards, pausing, disappearing, rising, sinking, scarcely seen on the yellow brown hillside, the smoke of their fire barely noticeable, and little but the reverberating echoes of the waste around to tell that a human wave, both wide and deep, was sweeping up the barren slopes in the heart of a sharp and bloody conflict. From Potgieter's whence the solemn boom of the naval guns heralded another demonstration, to Three Tree Hill where the hoarse report of the field guns rang frequent and sharp in concordance with the more hurried tread of the attack, and the angry gusts of Boer musketry rivalled in vehemence the volleys of the British, the air throbbed with the strain of a mighty effort.

For hours the struggle continued, and still Hart's infantry gained ground, despite the furious fire that was poured upon them. Taking advantage of the irregularities of the hillside the men pushed upwards, until at three o'clock in the afternoon they gained the edge of the plateau to the north and north-east of Three Tree Hill. From thence to the main position of the enemy stretched an unbroken glacis of 1,000 yards wide. All along the sky-line stretched the schantzes whose fire the battalions had been totally unable to overpower. Now and again, indeed, the shell fire seemed to quell the hearts of the defenders, and their guns, except for a short space during the afternoon, had

remained silent throughout the day. But as soon as our batteries slackened their fire the Boer riflemen re-opened, nor could any efforts on the part of the British artillerymen silence them when a favourable opportunity for firing on our infantry occurred. Crouching behind the solidly built stone walls, or in well-dug trenches, the flat ranging shrapnel passed harmlessly over them, or spattered vainly upon the rocks in their front.

The British firing line, composed mainly of the Lancashire men, had checked at the crest of the slope, and further than this, without reinforcements to lend weight and impetus to the assault, it was impossible to proceed. General Hart had, however, it appears, made up his mind to cross the open half-mile in his front and carry the schantzes at the point of the bayonet. The reserve battalions of the Irish Brigade was, therefore, brought up the hill in support, and the dusky slopes swarmed with men. Closer and closer upon the ridge line they clustered, and word came back to the guns that the infantry were making ready for the final attack. The massed batteries re-doubled their fire and covered the Boer position with the smoke of bursting shell. For a quarter of an hour the bombardment continued; then the infantry were seen filing to right and left into deep hollows of either side of the line of their previous advance. The order to attack had wisely been countermanded, the battalions fell back under cover of the ridge, and the battle was over for the day.

While Hart's battle had been proceeding in the centre, Dundonald had advanced against Bastion Hill. The task of seizing the kopje was allotted to the South African Light Horse, and was accomplished with great dash and unexpected ease. As usually happened when a small force of the Boers was boldly attacked, the party in possession of the kopje fled without resistance. Trooper Tobin far outstripped the rest of his squadron and arrived on the summit first. His solitary figure appeared in dangerous relief upon the sky-line, and those below momentarily expected him to fall, but scarcely a shot was fired, and the important position, which seemed to command the enemy's right, was taken without a single casualty. Not till Major Childe's squadrons reached the top did the Boer artillery open fire. One of the last shells

A BOER COMMANDO MARCHING THROUGH A STREAM

fired that day killed their gallant leader, but his followers held the hill until relieved by a detachment of the Queen's from Hildyard's brigade, which had followed in echelon on the left of Hart and had not been seriously engaged. Two of Hildyard's battalions relieved the Lancashire regiment, which had suffered heavily; the others remained on the left of the Irish Brigade. The total losses of the day were about 300 men and officers.

At sunset on the 20th, the British line held the rim of the plateau from Childe's Kopje to the right of Three Tree Hill. Parallel with it, and within rifle range, lay the ring of Boer defences.

For twelve hours the troops had been on the move, and had gained during that period two miles of ground. But the main position of the enemy was still intact, nor, having regard to the fatigue of the men and the desperate nature of the task, does it seem possible that a charge upon the schantzes could have succeeded. Once more the splendid efforts of the troops had been nullified by impregnable defences. The force bivouacked along the mountain side, passing the night in removing the wounded and vainly endeavouring to find shelter against the bitter wind which succeeded the fierce heat of the day. They had brought no great coats, and many wandered wearily about striving to keep themselves warm by exercise.

At dawn on the 21st, the fighting recommenced. The Boers had evacuated some trenches near Bastion Hill, and these were occupied. Further to the right the Dublin Fusiliers, who had suffered heavily on the day before reached and entered another trench. This was all the progress made. As the day advanced the strength of the enemy's line of the top of the plateau became fully revealed, and despite heavy gun and rifle fire no essential change in the relative positions took place. Many of the newly-revealed works to the northward were out of reach of the batteries on Three Tree Hill, and no artillery position could be found on the ridge our troops had seized. There were two reasons for this. On the crest of the ridge the guns would be within range of the Boer rifles; below the sky-line the slopes were too steep for the guns, and the view was obstructed. Sir Charles Warren telegraphed for four howitzers, which ranged further than the fifteen-

pounders, and by their high angle fire were more likely to be effective against the covered works of the enemy. These did not arrive till next morning. Another day of intense heat was followed by a night of piercing cold, and again our men had to bivouac on the desolate hill-side. Only the troops in the firing line had been exposed to rifle fire, but the Boer guns throwing shell from several directions had searched the hollows in which the reserves lay and had done their share of the damage.

Next morning (22nd) two howitzers were placed on Three Tree Hill, and two on the left in the plain. These last appear to have been supported by two field batteries, the Devon battalion of Hildyard's Brigade, and some of the mounted infantry, so that that flank was thus effectually secured against one or two Boer efforts to turn it. The heavy guns kept up a heavy cannonade, but beyond shaking the enemy's works the lyddite failed, as the field guns had done, to materially reduce their fire. The British casualties on this day did not exceed thirty, but no advance was possible, and it was clear that Warren's attack had come to a complete standstill.[1]

General Buller rode over to discuss matters with his subordinate.

[1] The following table, though far from complete, roughly indicates the proportionate losses of those battalions engaged in Warren's operations from the 17th–23rd :—

		Killed.		Wounded.		Missing.		
		Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Total.
Hart.	1st York and Lancaster	...	10	...	75	...	...	= 85
	2nd Lancashire Fusiliers	...	12	4	74	...	20	= 110
	1st Border Regiment	1	12	3	129	...	1	= 146
	2nd Dublin Fusiliers	1	3	1	40	...	2	= 47
	Inniskillings and Connaughts ...	...	1	1	12	...	1	= 15
Hildyard.	West Yorks	2	7	...	40	...	1	= 50
	West Surreys	1	5	3	30	...	1	= 40
	East Surreys	...	6	1	23	...	...	= 30
		5	56	13	423	...	26	= 523

One hundred and thirty-six killed, wounded, and missing in these operations and in the fight of Spion Kop are unaccounted for in this table and in that on p. 426. Lyttelton suffered a slight but appreciable loss in his demonstrations in front of Potgieter's, and the casualities of Dundonald and the artillery went far towards accounting for the rest.

It was clear to both that some new method would have to be tried, and General Warren proposed to relinquish his efforts on the left and to assault Spion Kop, which commanded the Fair View road from a distance of only 2,000 yards, and from which the enemy could make any movement by that route impossible. This dominating point seized, a wedge would be driven into the angle of the enemy's lines, and Brakfontein, as well as the hills towards Acton Homes, rendered untenable. Sir Redvers acceded to the proposal, and orders were drawn up instructing General Talbot Coke to take the mountain that night. Their execution was, however, postponed, as that officer rightly objected to undertaking so hazardous an operation without carefully reconnoitring the ground.

On the morning of the 23rd, General Buller, who does not appear to have been acquainted with the reason for the delay, again rode over to General Warren. He was seriously disquieted by the situation of the troops, who had been kept for four days "continuously exposed to shell and rifle fire on the edge of an almost precipitous hill," in a position which admitted of no second line, and in which the supports were massed close behind the firing line "in indefensible formations," so that a panic or sudden charge might send the whole lot in disorder down the hill at any moment. Sir Redvers added that the situation was too dangerous to be prolonged, and that either General Warren would have to attack, or his force would be withdrawn. The Commander-in-chief "advocated," as he had previously done, an advance from his left. Warren explained the reason for the postponement of the attack on Spion Kop, and said that he proposed to execute it that night. His superior agreed, suggesting only that as General Coke was lame from the effects of a broken leg, General Woodgate was better fitted for mountain climbing. This decided upon, General Buller rode back to Spearman's Camp.

ROYAL ASIA

CHAPTER XIX

SPION KOP

DESCRIPTION OF THE MOUNTAIN—THE MARCH—THE SUMMIT SEIZED—THE HOURS AFTER DAWN—THICK MIST—MOVEMENTS OF THE BOERS—MIST CLEARS—THEIR FIRE OPENS—BAD POSITION OF THE BRITISH—INADEQUATE TRENCHES—WOODGATE WOUNDED—HIGHLY CRITICAL SITUATION—DESPERATE FIGHTING—COLONEL CROFTON'S MESSAGE—THORNEYCROFT PLACED IN COMMAND—ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS—THE POSITION OVERCROWDED—THE ACTION SLACKENS—AFFAIRS ON THE SUMMIT STILL CRITICAL—AFTERNOON—SCENE ON THE SUMMIT—ATTACK OF THE KING'S ROYAL RIFLES ON THE EASTERN KOPJES—POSITIONS IN THE EVENING—COKE GOES DOWN TO REPORT TO WARREN—WARREN AND BULLER DURING THE DAY—COULD ARTILLERY BE GOT UP?—NAVAL GUNS START—CLOSE OF THE FIGHTING AT 8 P.M.—THORNEYCROFT RESOLVES TO RETREAT—THE RETIREMENT—JANUARY 25TH, BOERS ON THE SUMMIT—WOUNDED REMOVED—GENERAL BULLER—ORDERS A GENERAL RETREAT—WITHDRAWAL FROM THE NORTH BANK—BOERS MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO PURSUE—RELATIVE LOSSES—COMMENTS—SLOWNESS OF BRITISH ADVANCE—DELAYS BETWEEN FRERE AND SPRINGFIELD COULD HAVE BEEN REMEDIED BY SWIFT AND DECISIVE ACTION AT TRICHARDT'S DRIFT—THE BOERS TO SOME EXTENT SURPRISED—FURTHER DELAY AT TRICHARDT'S DRIFT—HOW FAR DUE TO IGNORANCE OF THE COUNTRY—POSITION AFTER DUNDONALD'S ACTION ON THE 18TH—REASONS FOR WARREN'S CHANGE OF PLAN—ENEMY'S STRENGTH—BOTHA'S OWN STATEMENT—BULLER THROUGHOUT OF OPINION THAT THE FLANKING MOVEMENT WAS THE BEST—DECISION TO ATTACK SPION KOP NOT UNREASONABLE—WHY THE PLAN FAILED—AIM OF PLAN—ERRORS—INADEQUATE AND WRONGLY-PLACED TRENCHES DUE TO MIST AND WANT OF KNOWLEDGE OF GROUND—OVERCROWDING OF TROOPS—WANT OF ARTILLERY—WANT OF SYSTEM; COULD THIS HAVE BEEN REMEDIED?—INCIDENTAL DIFFICULTIES, WANT OF WATER AND FAILURE OF BRITISH ARTILLERY—WOULD A STRONG ATTACK ALL ALONG THE LINE HAVE BEEN OF USE?—RESPONSIBILITY OF GENERALS WARREN AND BULLER—OUGHT NOT ONE OF THEM TO HAVE COME UP WHEN THE SUMMIT WAS TAKEN?—THE QUESTION OF COMMAND ON THE TOP—COKE AND THORNEYCROFT—WAS THORNEYCROFT RIGHT IN RETIRING?—A POSSIBLE "MOP UP"—COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SUMMIT AND WARREN—THORNEYCROFT'S MEN SHOULD HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY FRESH TROOPS—SPION KOP COULD HAVE BEEN HELD—THE WHOLE PLAN FAILED THROUGH FAULTS OF EXECUTION

THE mountain which General Warren had resolved to seize, and from which he hoped to render the positions of the enemy untenable, was one already famous in Boer history. It was from the summit of Spion Kop that the Vortrekkers, after crossing the Drakensberg, first gazed upon the rolling plains of Southern Natal, then swarming with game and infested by powerful and barbarous

tribes. Rising three or four hundred feet above the surrounding heights, it occupies the south-west corner of a three-sided plateau which runs roughly east and west for over a mile. The three angles are marked by well-defined kopjes, viz., the summit, two at the eastern and one at the northern extremities. The distance, as measured from top to top, is, from the summit to the northern kopje, about 1,000 yards; from the summit to the nearest of the eastern peaks one mile. The ground between the kop and the northern kopje slopes down into a comparatively gentle hollow; to the east, however, it falls very steeply to the lower plateau, which sloped ruggedly away from the main ridges and is

Photograph by] [Elliott & Fry

GENERAL WOODGATE

dominated by them. The southern edge of the tableland facing the river is very rugged, and in places precipitous. Access to Spion Kop itself is gained by a spur running to the south-west, one of the upper buttresses of which formed the extreme left of the Boer line facing Warren's right outposts. This spur rises sharply in steps. The lower knob, about a mile and a half from the top, was occupied by a post of the South Lancashires. The upper was marked by a small mimosa patch about 600 yards below the summit, and it was here that the reserves were concentrated during the action.

The actual summit is about 300 yards long and as many broad. It

SPION KOP

rises slightly towards the centre, and is open except for outcrops of rocks along and in rear of its northern edge. Towards the south-east corner it sinks down into a kind of subordinate plateau, occupied late in the day by part of the Middlesex Regiment. The ground between the kop and the Boer positions to north and east is undulating and strewn with boulders.

The way from Warren's right flank to this mountain fastness lay across a deep donga, and then north-eastwards up the spur. During the 23rd it had been carefully reconnoitred from many points of view by General Coke, but as it was partially occupied by the Boers no closer examination was made. At 6 p.m., therefore, the attacking column paraded. It was composed of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, the 2nd Royal Lancaster Regiment, 180 of Thorneycroft's Horse, and a half-company of Royal Engineers. Two companies of the Connaught Rangers and the Imperial Light Infantry who had just arrived at Trichardt's Drift were in support, lining the ridge from which Woodgate's battalions were to advance.

Without lights and in dead silence the troops wound slowly across the donga and up the opposing slopes. The night was one of intense darkness. The true direction was lost at starting and only regained after considerable delay. Very cautiously, and with several halts to collect and rest the men, Woodgate and Thorneycroft worked their way upward. Above them loomed the huge shoulders of the mountain, not even the rush of falling water breaking the utter quiet of their beetling crags. Far to the left gleamed the signal lights near the batteries of Three Tree Hill; further away the occasional crackle of rifle fire told that the Boers were sniping at the crests held by Hart's and Hildyard's infantry. For hours the toilsome march continued. As they approached the higher parts of the mountain the advanced guard of the column fixed bayonets and made ready to rush any entrenchments they might meet. It was long after midnight when, as they gained the top of the second great step of the ridge, a Boer sentinel challenged sharply. "Waterloo!" was the answer, and the man fell bayoneted as he turned to fly. The picquet behind him threw forth one hasty splutter of musketry and vanished into the darkness. Thorneycroft on the left, the Lancashire

Fusiliers on the right, seized the trench and pressed on. They had still some distance to go. As they reached the true summit sixty Boers, who held two shallow trenches on the topmost crest, fled without resistance. The hill was in our hands, and the cheering of the troops rang downwards through the mists to the ears of the anxious watchers fifteen hundred feet below along the Tugela. The first part of the operation had met with brilliant success. After nearly ten hours' marching through pitch-darkness, over steep and broken ground, 1,700 men had seized the key of the enemy's lines with the loss of only three wounded.

It was 3.40 a.m. when the leading troops established themselves on the tableland and set to work to secure their position. This was no easy matter, for the mist hung heavily on the crest and hid out all the surrounding country. The Boer trenches across the centre of the plateau were occupied and somewhat improved, and sangars were built. The ground was too rocky for regular entrenching, but boulders were plentiful. Unfortunately there was no method infused into these preparations. The ground and the direction of the enemy's positions were unknown, and we are not aware that General Woodgate, who was ill, attempted to penetrate beyond the northern edge of the plateau or to feel for the enemy along the eastern kopjes. The thick darkness of night and fog probably rendered any such attempt to forge ahead or to spread out impracticable. The actual fact is certain that when between 8 and 9 a.m. the mists rolled off the mountain top, Woodgate's force lay exposed to the enemy's fire, its few defences open to enfilade and generally too weak to withstand the battering they were now to receive.

While the British were endeavouring to establish themselves the Boer leaders acted with vigour. Their positions, as Louis Botha practically admitted afterwards,[1] would be untenable if the English were allowed to maintain their position. It was necessary to hurl them off the hill before they could get up guns and overwhelm the Boer pieces on the lower ridges. Botha, who knew the small size of the actual kop, and, according to his own account, had few men to spare, sent forward 300 men from the Standerton and Carolina commandos to creep up to the crest of the northern and eastern flanks of the summit,

[1] Interview with Mr. M. Davitt. *Freeman's Journal*, July 10th.

GENERAL VIEW OF FIELD OF BATTLE BEFORE SPION KOP FROM GUN HILL

much in the same way as Schmidt's men climbed up the spurs and gullies of Majuba. They left their horses behind the northern kopje and as the mists lifted began to crawl down amongst the boulders and disappeared from the sight of the British into the lower ground north of the kop. At the same time from the eastern hills a heavy rifle and shell fire opened upon Woodgate's right from a strong body of the enemy who had two guns in position, a 7·5 cm. Krupp and a 3·6 cm. Maxim. From the left, most probably from the kopje on which the Boer artillery had been placed to oppose Warren's earlier efforts, four guns, consisting of a quick-firing Krupp, a 3·7 cm. Maxim, and two Creusot field-guns, with possibly some of those captured at Colenso threw a still fiercer fire upon the bare plateau, a Boer officer near the firing-line heliographing the positions of our infantry to his comrades in the battery. The northern kopje was held by other Boers who kept up a heavy rain of bullets upon the defences that ran across our straitened front. Thus from three directions, within a range of 2,000 yards, a bare space 400 yards square and filled by perhaps 1,500 men was swept by guns of modern type, and by the bullets from hundreds of repeating rifles. The British artillery, which had opened fire upon the northern part of Spion Kop before the mists cleared, proved unable to keep down the fire. The enemy's guns, cleverly hidden by intervening crests from the Three Tree Hill batteries, could not be located, and his thin lines of riflemen were invisible on the brown hillsides. The whole significance of the situation lay in the fact that the few hundreds of Boers actually engaged were scattered over an enormous area of hill-slope, gully and boulder, while the whole weight of their shot fired from infinitely varying ranges fell into our tiny and coverless position.

The fight opened suddenly. The mists cleared with that dramatic rapidity familiar to mountaineers, and as they rose the first Boer shell burst upon the summit. Before the force could be properly disposed men were falling fast under a merciless hail of shot. Little enough could our gallant infantry do in reply. Cowering under their ineffectual defences,[1]

[1] "Behind these our men attempted to conceal themselves, often five or ten deep" (letter from an officer in *Today*, April 5th).

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL THORNEYCROFT AND OFFICERS OF THORNEYCROFT'S MOUNTED INFANTRY

they sought in vain for a fair mark. At the moment when the fight commenced Thorneycroft's men were on the left, the Lancashire Fusiliers on the right front, the Royal Lancasters in rear of the left. The firing-line curved round in a rough quarter-circle so as to make head against the eastern and north-western as well as the northern attack. The advanced companies had not occupied the northern edge of the summit but lay seventy or eighty yards behind it. In rear of the first line the so-called reserves were massed, for the most part equally exposed and unable to fire a shot in reply.

For a time the troops bore their heavy punishment nobly. But as the morning advanced it became necessary to steady the companies in front by fresh men, and the losses grew heavier as section after section were hurried forward across the plateau to strengthen or extend the firing-line. The rain of shell and bullets fell faster and faster; many officers were hit, order began to vanish, units got confused, and the dreadful strain became too much for the nerves of some. At 10 a.m. General Woodgate, who up to this moment had conducted the defence with unsparing courage, was mortally wounded above the eye, when close to the firing-line. Colonel Crofton, who as senior officer now took command, heliographed to Generals Buller and Warren, "Reinforce at once, or all lost. General dead."

Warren replied that he was sending two battalions, and that the Imperial Light Infantry were on their way up. He added, "You must hold on to the last. No surrender." General Coke[1] started at once with the Middlesex and Dorsetshire Regiments, and with orders to take command of the troops on the hill. Meanwhile General Buller, who was at the signal-station at Spearman's Farm when Crofton's message arrived, saw that the men on Spion Kop had given way, and telegraphed to Warren, "Unless you put some really good hard-fighting man in command on the top you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft." General Warren followed his commander's suggestion, and heliographed that Thorneycroft was placed in command of the summit with

[1] Major-General Coke had been placed in command of the 5th Division (his own brigade and Woodgate's) on the 22nd. Colonel Hill succeeded him in the command of the 10th Brigade.

the local rank of brigadier-general.[1] He omitted, however, to warn Coke.

Meanwhile affairs on Spion Kop were rapidly becoming more critical. The hours after Woodgate's fall were perhaps the most dangerous of the day. The Boer attack had now fully developed, and the advanced parties of riflemen, having crossed the space between the north kopje and the kop, had ascended to the edge of the plateau some seventy yards from the most advanced line of

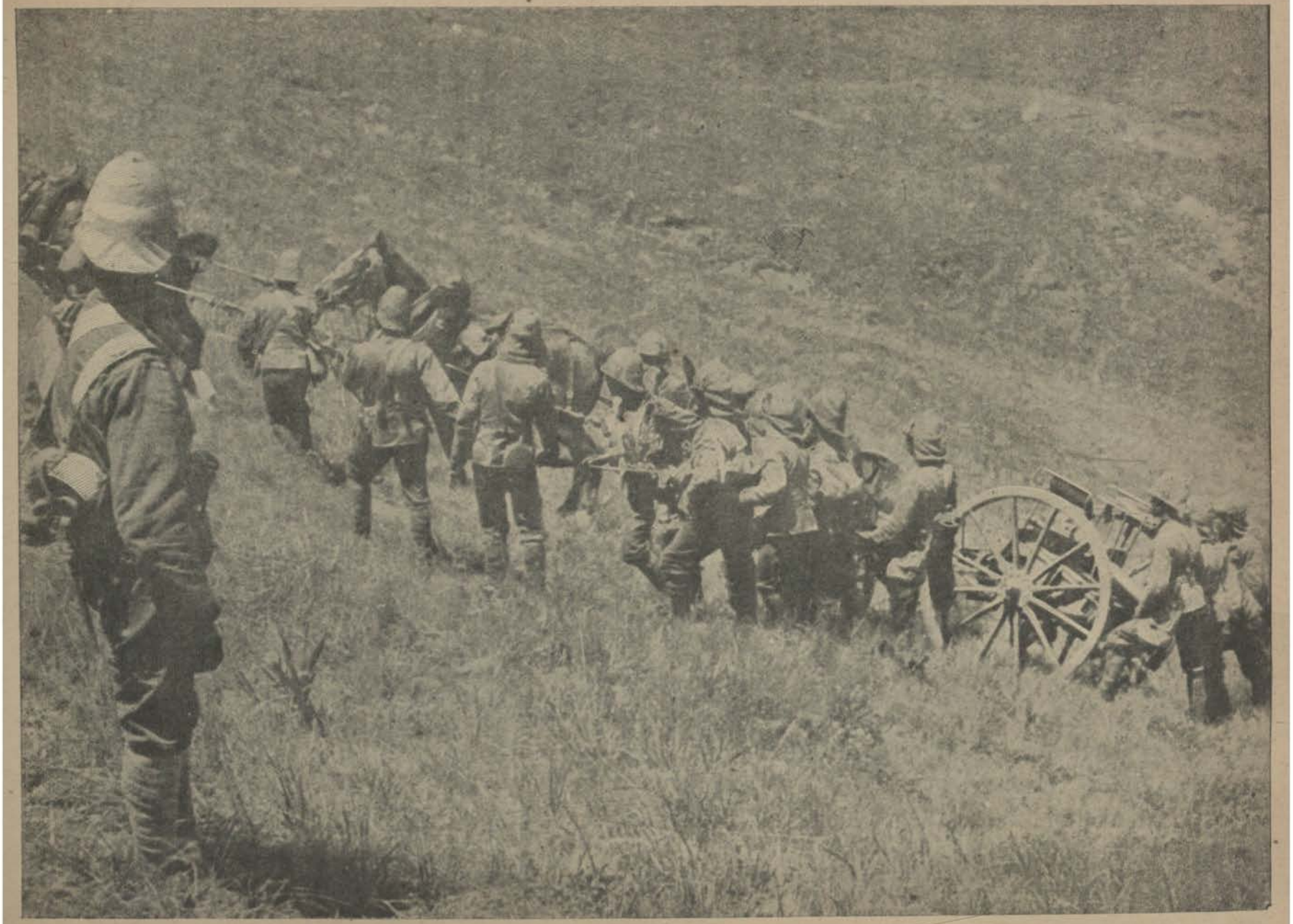
SPION KOP: GENERAL BULLER AND STAFF WATCHING THE OPERATIONS FROM MOUNT ALICE

trenches. Desperate fighting ensued. The sudden appearance and deadly fire of the enemy for a moment shook the steadfastness of the defenders. Part of the first line broke and fell back, and the Boers pursuing hotly, entered the trenches and compelled some 150 men to surrender. Encouraged by these successes, they pushed forward, one

[1] Lord Roberts places the hour of this appointment at midday; Sir C. Warren says, "shortly after 10 a.m." This seems more correct, for General Coke's men began to reach the summit at 1 p.m.

party, with rifles slung behind them, boldly walking up to a trench occupied by some twenty of the British, who threw up their hands in token of surrender. But Colonel Thorneycroft, whose commanding figure was conspicuous as he moved hither and thither in the heart of the fight, rushed to the spot and called out to the enemy that he allowed no surrender, and bade them go on firing. Taking him at his word, the enemy, scarcely thirty yards distant, fired, and many of our men fell back dead into the trench. The rest broke and fled for two hundred yards before Thorneycroft could rally them. For a time the strain upon the shattered battalions of Woodgate was tremendous. With astounding hardihood the Boers pressed up over the crest and fought hand to hand with the British, clubbed musket against bayonet. Slowly they were driven back, and our men followed until the cross-fire from the flanks paralysed anew their efforts. Then they in their turn retired, and again the scattered parties of Dutch riflemen came on, striving by ruse or force to fling their sorely-tried opponents off the plateau. One of the Lancashire men had a deadly wrestle with a Boer, finally hurling him down a precipice. Mason, of Thorneycroft's Horse, shot three Boers dead at short range, and then staggered out of action himself with his helmet riddled with bullets and a wound in his shoulder. So close were the opposing forces that many men were hit several times. This spell of fighting on Spion Kop will match in desperate endeavour and persistency the fierce struggles of the Crimea or even the tremendous conflicts of the Peninsula.

At length the two sides drew apart, the Boers regaining the boulders along the edge of the plateau, the British partially reoccupying their trenches. But not for a moment did the firing cease, and the position of the infantry grew steadily more unendurable. The pompom shells scored the tableland with dotted lines of smoke and dust, the air throbbed with bursting shrapnel and flying splinters, and the Mausers kept up a steady fusillade, which redoubled whenever an effort was made to gain ground. The loss in officers had now become most serious, and the men, deprived of their proper leaders, lost confidence and began to waver. Only the great efforts of Thorneycroft, his quicksightedness and decision, averted a disaster greater than Majuba. He rallied the



DRAGGING A MAXIM UP SPION KOP

faint-hearted, supported the enduring, and seems to have imparted something like combination and system to the shattered forces of the defence. But he could not alter the unequal conditions of the fight, and after midday it became clear that mortal men could not bear the terrible ordeal much longer.

About one o'clock Coke's troops drew near the summit. Loath as he was to throw more troops into a firing-line already too closely packed, he was compelled to support the men in front, and sent forward the Imperial Light Infantry and the Middlesex under Colone Hill. Part of the latter went into the firing line; the rest prolonged it to the right towards the south-east corner. The reinforcement arrived in the nick of time. Borne on by the momentum of the fresh and formed bodies of men, the remnant of Woodgate's force swept forward and drove the Boers from the trenches. Not, however, at a single effort, for the fighting was bitter and protracted, and it was not till 3 p.m. that the Middlesex got a grip of the foremost trenches. For a moment the Boer attack seemed broken, though the shells and the enfilading fire from the eastern kopjes were as damaging as ever. It remained to get as many troops as could be spared out of the firing-line and under cover. General Coke, therefore, now in command of the force, ordered down the Dorsets to the mimosa patch, where, with Bethune's Mounted Infantry, they formed a reserve. More than this, consistently with holding the kop, it was impossible to do, for the battalions most heavily engaged were inextricably mixed and scattered, and quite beyond the control of a single man. They remained spread over the whole of the summit until night freed them from the fire which had ravaged their ranks for twelve hours.

The scene on the mountain during the afternoon was horrible. On the kop itself everything was confusion and dust and blood. For the first time during the war shrapnel had a fair field, and the wounds inflicted were ghastly. Men lay hideously shattered in groups where the shells had struck them. The survivors, bespattered with their blood, crouched down wherever cover was obtainable, or hurried from place to place pursued by the hostile missiles. Ammunition was running out in some parts of the line, and the officers dare not go

STORMING OF THE EASTERN KOPJES BY THE 3RD KING'S ROYAL RIFLES

back for fear of the effect on the men. The long strain was beginning to exhaust the physical and moral power of the soldiers. Many lay on the ground fast asleep. "A small but steady leakage of unwounded men of all corps" dribbled rearward. Up the hillside wound trains with ammunition and water-carts, medical stores and supplies of food; down it, past the field hospital at the mimosa patch, poured an endless succession of stretchers bearing the wounded. Some, able to walk, reeled down the mountain leaning on each other for support; others crawled out of the fire on their hands and knees—grim currents crossing and recrossing on the edges of the main whirlpool of battle.[1]

Some time after one o'clock General Lyttelton, watching the fight from Mount Alice, determined to lighten the pressure on Spion Kop by vigorous movement elsewhere. It was clear that the infantry on the hill itself and the guns on Three Tree Hill were quite unable to keep down the fire of the enemy. The latter must be assaulted on a wider front, and either driven from his position or forced to divert his attention from the unfortunate troops on the summit. The best objective of such an attack was the eastern kopjes, whence throughout the day a most harassing cross-fire had been poured on our right flank. Therefore, early in the afternoon, General Lyttelton ordered half his brigade, the 3rd King's Royal Rifles and the 2nd Cameronians, to cross the Tugela at Kaffir's Drift, above Potgieter's, the latter battalion to support the troops on the kop itself, the former to attack more to the east.

It was close on 3 p.m. when Colonel Buchanan Riddell got the Rifles into extended order and advanced straight up the precipitous face in his front. The enemy, scattered along the crest of the ridge in several trenches, opened a heavy fire of musketry, to which the assailants could make no effective reply. But the upward rush was never checked. Climbing from ledge to ledge and gully to gully this fine battalion went steadily forward, four companies, under their colonel, against the right kopje, and four against the left, under Major Bewicke-Copley. Slowly and reluctantly the Boers retired before their advance; line upon line of stone shelters and trenches were successively carried.

[1] See Winston Churchill.

The losses were heavy and continuous, but the Rifles neither wavered nor hurried, until at 5.15 a final rush cleared the topmost crest and the second highest point of Spion Kop was won. But at a great cost. The gallant colonel and two lieutenants had been killed, four other officers had been wounded, and nearly one hundred rank and file strewed the slope over which the attack had passed. Here, as elsewhere, the Boers had fought stubbornly though there had been no hand-to-hand fighting.

Once on the top, there began the same fusillade which had been going on all day on the kop. Though they succeeded in silencing the Maxim on the left flank, the Rifles could get no further, and dusk still found them on the kopjes, interchanging a hot fire with the Boers on the lower ground beyond.

A little before 4 p.m. the Cameronians reached the summit, where their help was sorely needed. About 4.30 p.m. a last effort was made by the Boers to fling their opponents off the plateau. Once again their sharp-shooters crept up and opened fire over the northern crest upon the exhausted men in the trenches. Several times they strove to win by sudden rushes. The weary troops in the front line began to waver.[1] Just at the critical moment the Cameronians advanced, and with a strong counter-stroke hurled the enemy back. Nor could any further attacks dislodge them from the position they had won. For the rest of the action they formed an unshaken barrier against the hostile fire, and when night fell the whole of the mountain-top was in British hands.

The Boers still held the northern kopje and the lower slopes of the eastern hills. At great cost and in spite of several blunders the heroism of the troops had maintained the position. To make it absolutely secure and to properly develop the opportunities given by the ground for a vigorous offensive upon the rear and flank of the hostile positions a strong force of artillery and fresh infantry were absolutely necessary. If these could be got up a victory would be well within our grasp.

We naturally ask what had been done during the day to get up

[1] Ammunition is said to have given out.

guns and to prepare efficient cover? According to Mr. Burleigh guns were sent for as soon as Woodgate reached the top. Whether this be so or not, no attempt was made to send them till late in the evening. The sending up of some sand-bags early in the morning appears to have been the only step taken during the day by those below to artificially strengthen the position. Sir C. Warren's position was a difficult one. For some hours the General could get no information, as the signallers and their apparatus had been destroyed by the heavy fire. At 1.20 he heliographed to ascertain whether Thorneycroft had taken command, and at the same time asked General Coke to give him his views on the situation. During the afternoon the latter sent several messages describing the situation and repeatedly asking for supplies of food and water, doctors, stretchers, &c., but received no reply. Of these reports Sir C. Warren makes no mention in his published despatch, but he acknowledges the receipt of one at 6 p.m. in which General Coke expressed his opinion that unless the artillery could silence the Boer guns the men on the top could not stand another day's shelling. During the afternoon General Warren appears to have remained near Three Tree Hill partly directing the fire of the artillery. It must have been some time after six when Mr. Churchill, who had gone up to Spion Kop about four o'clock, came down and told the General what he had seen, his account apparently making much the same impression upon the latter's mind as General Coke's message.

At 6.30 p.m. Warren, in accordance with a telegram from the Commander-in-chief, asked Coke if he could keep two battalions on the summit, removing the remainder out of reach of the shells; also whether two battalions would suffice to hold the position. General Coke never received any message till 8 p.m., when he was ordered to come down and consult. He tried to send a message, urging the danger of leaving his command, by lamp signalling, but the supply of oil had failed, and he reluctantly left his post, leaving orders with his brigade-major, Captain Phillips, that the troops were on no account to retire without further instructions. At the same time he made arrangements to carry out a withdrawal if ordered to do so. He was still unaware that Colonel Thorneycroft had been put in

command earlier in the day, while General Buller was apparently equally ignorant of the fact that General Coke was on Spion Kop at all. The latter descended the mountain, but, as Sir C. Warren had changed the position of his headquarters, he did not reach him till 1 a.m. During the interval arrangements had been made to send up the Mountain Battery, which had just marched in from Springfield,[1] and two naval 12-pounders, under Lieutenant James, R.N., together with half a company of Royal Engineers, two working parties of six hundred men each, and a large number of sand-bags. They were toiling up the lower spurs when they met the head of a descending column. It was the garrison of the hill in full retreat.

The facts relating to the dislocation of command, which was one of the main causes of the evacuation, were, so far as we can ascertain, the following. On his arrival on Spion Kop or soon after it, General Coke, while retaining the general direction of affairs in his own hands, appears to have placed Colonel Hill (Colonel Crofton being wounded) in command of the summit. It rested with Hill as the immediate chief to get in touch with the battalion commanders and through them conduct the defence. Colonel Thorneycroft being one of these, it is difficult to understand how the arrival and position of Hill was not communicated to him, or how those officers were prevented from coming to an understanding in the course of the afternoon. So far as time and space were concerned, however, there was nothing to hinder an explanation. Had this taken place, Thorneycroft would have reported himself to Coke and have taken his orders.[2] No better proof of the confusion reigning on the summit can be adduced than the fact that from one o'clock to eight, part of which time General Coke was on the actual top, no one informed him of Thorneycroft's appointment. He consequently remained ignorant of the fact that the colonel was technically his second in command, and left the hill under the impression that Phillips would convey his orders to Hill. As regards Thorneycroft himself, we must suppose that either he was unaware of Coke's or Hill's presence, which seems incredible,

[1] *Times* account.

[2] Thorneycroft being temporarily a Brigadier, and Coke a General of Division.

or that, taking for granted that Sir C. Warren had informed Coke of his exceptional position, he thought it unnecessary to trouble the General further. He told Churchill he had had no leisure to write messages. So desperate had been the fighting that he had been obliged to stay in the firing line, certainly the wrong place for a commander, all day.

In the absence of General Coke, he had come to the conclusion that in the then state of the troops and without guns or proper entrenchments the summit was untenable. He had of course received no message from General Warren to the effect that the needed reinforcements were on their way. Mr. Churchill, who had been sent up by that General[1] in order to learn Thorneycroft's views, found him sitting on the ground amidst the survivors of his own regiment. The correspondent explained the state of affairs, but the decision had already been taken. In spite of the protests of Phillips and others, he had given the order to retreat. "Better six good battalions safely down the hill than a mop up in the morning"—a significant phrase from so tough and resolute a soldier.

So through the darkness, leaving their dead and wounded behind them, the exhausted troops descended the long broken slopes and slowly began to re-form on the level ground near the river. It took many hours to collect them in their proper battalions. The Cameronians, who alone had any right to be called intact, mustered 270 men out of 800. Many were temporarily lost, and had the Boers acted vigorously next day they might have made a goodly collection of prisoners, for the men were wandering all over the mountain utterly worn out and completely ignorant of where they were. But the enemy had no thought of taking the offensive. The fighting had tried them more than General Botha has chosen to confess. Watchers from Ladysmith as well as from Spion Kop saw them preparing to retreat, long lines of waggons moving northward and westward, and other such signs of nervous indecision and precipitation.

[1] He must have been sent up after General Coke had been ordered to come down and report himself. Otherwise Warren would have sent Churchill to the latter and not to Thorneycroft—unless of course he had taken the rather unusual course of consulting a subordinate without reference to his superior.

THE RETREAT OVER THE TUGELA AFTER SPION KOP

The dogged defence and endurance of the British infantry had so deeply impressed the enemy, that many despaired of driving them from the hill. Had it been held and the necessary precautions taken, we cannot doubt but that the enemy would have been compelled to retreat. So true is it, that in war the best time to press an attack is often the very moment when persistence appears most hopeless.

General Buller was riding next morning from his camp at Spearmen's Hill to the Tugela, when he received the news of the abandonment of Spion Kop. He immediately rode to Warren's camp, which he reached at 5 a.m., and decided that the enemy's right was too strong to force, and that another attack on Spion Kop would be useless, *i.e.*, more disastrous than the one which had already taken place. He resolved to withdraw the whole army to the southern bank, and by 6 a.m. the removal of the baggage had commenced. The waggon park which had been established to the west of Ventner's Spruit was ordered to recross; the troops were to hold themselves in readiness to turn out in thirty minutes. The men who had fought on Spion Kop returned as soon as possible to the positions they had occupied before the night of the 23rd. All that day, under the supervision of General Buller, who had now taken direct command of the operations, the ponderous ox-waggons (232 in number) ploughed across Waggon Drift at the rate of eight miles per hour, double spans being necessary to attain even this rate of speed. On the pontoon bridge higher up 267 mule waggons of various sizes crossed, the animals in every case being unharnessed and the vehicles passed over by hand. For seven hours of the night the drift could not be used, but despite the difficulties and delays, and the constant crossing and recrossing of ambulances, all the baggage was over by 11 p.m. on the 26th. The retreat of the troops, who had remained in position to cover the retirement of the transport, began from the left that evening in driving rain, the cavalry and artillery crossing before midnight, and the infantry last of all. Some of Coke's battalions formed the rearguard and held positions near the river till the rest were over. By 6.15 a.m. all the troops had passed, by 8 a.m. the pontoons had disappeared, the

chesses "so worn by the traffic," that General Buller did not think that they would have lasted another half-hour. Not till the last troops had crossed the bridge did the Boers attempt to harass the retreat. Then, just as the pontoons were clear, a single shell plunged into the river. The withdrawal had been accomplished without the loss of a man or a pound of stores.

No armistice had been officially asked for, but the day after the fight chaplains, doctors, and stretcher-bearers went up the Kop and worked till the 27th, burying the dead and collecting the wounded. Accounts received bear witness to the kindness and fairness of the Boers, many of whom had wandered up to the scene of conflict. Such looting as took place was for the most part perfectly legitimate, except in a few cases where the fingers of the dead were found cut off in order to obtain rings.

General Botha, who was on the spot, after complaining of the conduct of some of our generals regarding prisoners and wounded, gave our people leave to remove all the injured and sent back some wounded prisoners.[1]

The scene on the summit was of a most horrible description. Most of the dead had perished by shell wounds, many inflicted by shrapnel. The plateau was a veritable shambles. The effect of such a sight on the nerves of men already tried by long hours of desperate fighting can easily be imagined.[2]

The total losses of the week's fighting (January 17th to 24th) was thirty-two officers and 282 men killed or died of wounds, forty-eight officers and 1,020 men wounded, seven officers and 340 men missing. Some of the latter appear to have been killed, for Mr. Bennett Burleigh was informed by the chaplains that 243 bodies were buried on Spion Kop alone. Buller's fighting strength had been diminished by 1,729.

[1] See extracts from the Rev. F. Collins' report to Sir Charles Warren sent home by Laffan's correspondent on February 6th. They are interesting as showing the distorted views which perfectly honest men obtain of each other's actions in time of war.

[2] Prince Kraft von Hohenlohe, in his Artillery Letters, advises the removal of the dead on the empty ammunition waggons, "as it is unadvisable to leave them too long in the sight of the battery." This, of course, there was no opportunity of doing at Spion Kop.

The casualties during the 24th were approximately the following:—

	Killed.		Wounded.		Missing.		
	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Total.
Staff	2	...	...	...	...	... =	2
3rd King's Rifles	3	19	4	65	...	1 =	92
2nd Cameronians	3	20	6	64	...	1 =	94
1st South Lancashires[1]	1	3	1	22	...	13 =	40
2nd Lancs. Fusiliers	3	39	9	97	3	170 =	321
2nd Royal Lancs.	3	34	4	98	1	51 =	191
1st York and Lancs.	...	...	3	10	...	... =	13
2nd Middlesex	3	20	4	58	1	16 =	102
Thorneycroft's M. I.	6	20	4	40	1	12 =	83
Imperial Light Infantry	2	23	2	74	1	20 =	122
	26	178	37	528	7	284 =	1060

There were actually engaged about 4,000 men, who suffered, excluding missing, a loss of 19 per cent. In the original column of Woodgate, consisting of about 1,700 men, the losses rose to 357, or nearly 20 per cent. In Thorneycroft's corps the percentage was 40. These proportions are for modern war high, but they fall far below those of Napoleonic times. Our losses at Spion Kop were inflicted, roughly speaking, in twelve hours; those at Waterloo in about eight. To carry the comparison further, the slaughter in both cases was mainly due to cannon fire. The difference lay in the fact that on Spion Kop the dreadful storm of shell hardly ever ceased, whereas Wellington's men were able to revenge themselves on the French cavalry and infantry, whose attacks masked their own artillery. They were, moreover, not exposed to a flanking fire. In both instances the endurance of the troops was terribly tried, and we are inclined to think that Spion Kop was as trying an ordeal as that of Mont St. Jean. In any case, we have the assurance, if it be needed, that the descendants of those militiamen to whose "obstinate and indomitable bravery" Napoleon ascribed the French defeat, have inherited in full measure the qualities of their ancestors. "No!"

[1] Of the South Lancashires only two companies appear to have been engaged, and the York and Lancaster Regiment was not on Spion Kop, so far as we can discover, at all. The Somersets and Dorsets lost one man each.

THE DEVONS CROSSING THE TUGELA

exclaimed a Boer doctor, as he looked upon that dreadful scene of carnage, "we Boers would not, could not suffer like that."

Of the Boer losses as usual nothing definite can be said. Mr. B. Burleigh reckoned those killed during the week's fighting at 350. This, like many of his estimates, seems to us too high. Our artillery fire did not do much damage—at Spion Kop hardly any according to the account of the enemy—and our rifle fire was mostly unaimed. Only when the enemy came to close quarters were the conditions at all equal. Three estimates of the Boer losses at Spion Kop appeared in the papers. They varied between fifty-three and twenty-six killed, and between 120 and 110 wounded. These figures do not seem to us unreasonable. As was said above, probably not more than a thousand of the enemy were engaged, and, under the circumstances, a loss of 15 per cent. would have been a comparatively heavy one.

So ended an expedition which, as General Buller said, ought to have succeeded. Many things in the conduct of the operations demand explanation and some unquestionably invite criticism. We shall endeavour to place the points at issue in as clear a light as our present information will allow.

General Buller left Frere with the intention of outflanking, *i.e.*, surprising the enemy, and compelling them either to abandon the siege of Ladysmith or accept battle under disadvantageous conditions. The essentials of success were speed and secrecy. When the cavalry seized Spearman's Hill the general direction of attack was disclosed. The greatest rapidity was therefore necessary in order to cross the river and pierce the hill barrier before the Boers could concentrate to oppose the advance. The rearmost troops were at Springfield on the 13th, but General Warren did not get his order until the 15th. The stated cause of delay was want of supplies; yet it should have been possible to do as was done a few days later, namely, provide the men with three or four days' rations and make a push to seize the heights beyond the river, for on the capture of these everything depended. The march from Frere to the drifts ought to have been a forced march. Had General Warren thrown his bridges on the 14th he would have met with a much weaker resistance. The heavier Boer

guns would probably not have been in position, and at any rate the enemy would have had less time to prepare defences.

But even starting when he did (*i.e.*, on the 16th) there were still points in his favour. The Boers were not expecting him at Trichardt's Drift, only a few patrols watching the river bank. It was surprising that he did not occupy the north bank the same evening, throw his bridges during the night, pass with his whole force the next day (17th), seize Acton Homes, and, as far as the enemy would permit, occupy the hills which lay to the right of the road. This would not have required an extraordinary effort, the circumstances being considered. The force need not have been delayed by waiting for the baggage. It would only have required food for three or four days and a good supply of ammunition. On the 18th Dundonald could have wheeled to the eastward and commenced the turning movement, all the infantry available, after the safety of the road and drifts had been provided for, being sent to reinforce him. By the evening of the 18th the plain north of Spion Kop would not improbably have been gained, in which case the Boers, who were always very sensitive as to their communications, would, we believe, have fallen back from their river positions. By the same evening the supply waggons would have been near the river, if not actually across it. It will be said, perhaps, that the above is based merely on supposition. We reply that it is based upon a difference of forty-eight hours. Had the British flank attack begun on the morning of the 18th instead of the 20th and been directed not against the Spion Kop-Acton Homes position but along the Tintwa-Ladysmith road and to the north of it, General Warren would have been operating not only in a more effective direction but over a somewhat easier country and against a weaker enemy. As it was the choice of routes was not made until the 19th. This loss of forty-eight hours was a more serious disadvantage than the halt at Springfield. By moving his whole force to Trichardt's Drift, Warren finally declared his design, and could rely no longer on secrecy but rapidity. Yet for the next three days his movements show a deliberation that want of knowledge of the country or difficulties of transport do not entirely account for. A month later we

see Lord Roberts, in a moment of great crisis, subordinate the question of supply altogether, bend his gaze unflinchingly upon the retreating Cronje, and calling upon his men for a supreme effort, obtain his object with an army more than half-starved. Sir Charles Warren's task was not so difficult in point of endurance as that of Lord Roberts. His delay at Ventner's Spruit simply enabled the enemy to penetrate his intentions and finally to force him to make a frontal attack on a tremendously strong position.

By the evening of the 18th the position, though growing more critical with each hour's delay, was still fairly favourable to the British. Lord Dundonald had won the brilliant little action which gave him command of the Ladysmith road; the enemy had sustained a rebuff; and the baggage was passing the Tugela. Next day saw an ominous change. Sir Charles Warren recalled Dundonald, decided that the three and a half days' provisions, which he seems to have thought were all that his Commander-in-chief would allow him, were insufficient to supply the troops during the *détour*,[1] and determined to force the road by Fair View. As far as can be gleaned from the despatches it was the question of supply that decided the choice of route, not, as was suggested, the fact that the march by Acton Homes entailed a movement across the enemy's front or the further difficulty of maintaining communication with the bridges. The last reason would at first sight seem far weightier than the one assigned, for seventeen days' supply had been collected in the neighbourhood of Springfield, and General Buller had promised to keep Warren "filled up" as he required. The degree of dangers involved in crossing an enemy's front, especially when it is parallel to one's line of communication, depends, as Frederick the Great so often showed and as the allies found to their cost at Austerlitz, upon the enemy. If General Botha was correct in saying that he had only 3,000 men to defend his whole position, Warren could have safely moved to Acton Homes. No doubt the Boer numbers were greatly over-estimated. Their leader told Mr. M. Davitt that he had "had a good laugh on reading

[1] See par. 6 of Sir C. Warren's report on the operations from January 17–27th, and also the despatches of General Buller and himself relating to Spion Kop.

where the General (Buller) says that he had tried to get behind his positions by way of Acton Homes, but that Lord Dundonald always found them (the Boers) 'so numerically strong' that he had to give up the attempt, or words to that effect. The fact was, his only force in the operations against being outflanked by Dundonald consisted

GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA

of 800 men! He, however, shifted his position so often, especially during the night-time, that the English General believed them to be four times as strong as they really were."[1] But the British General

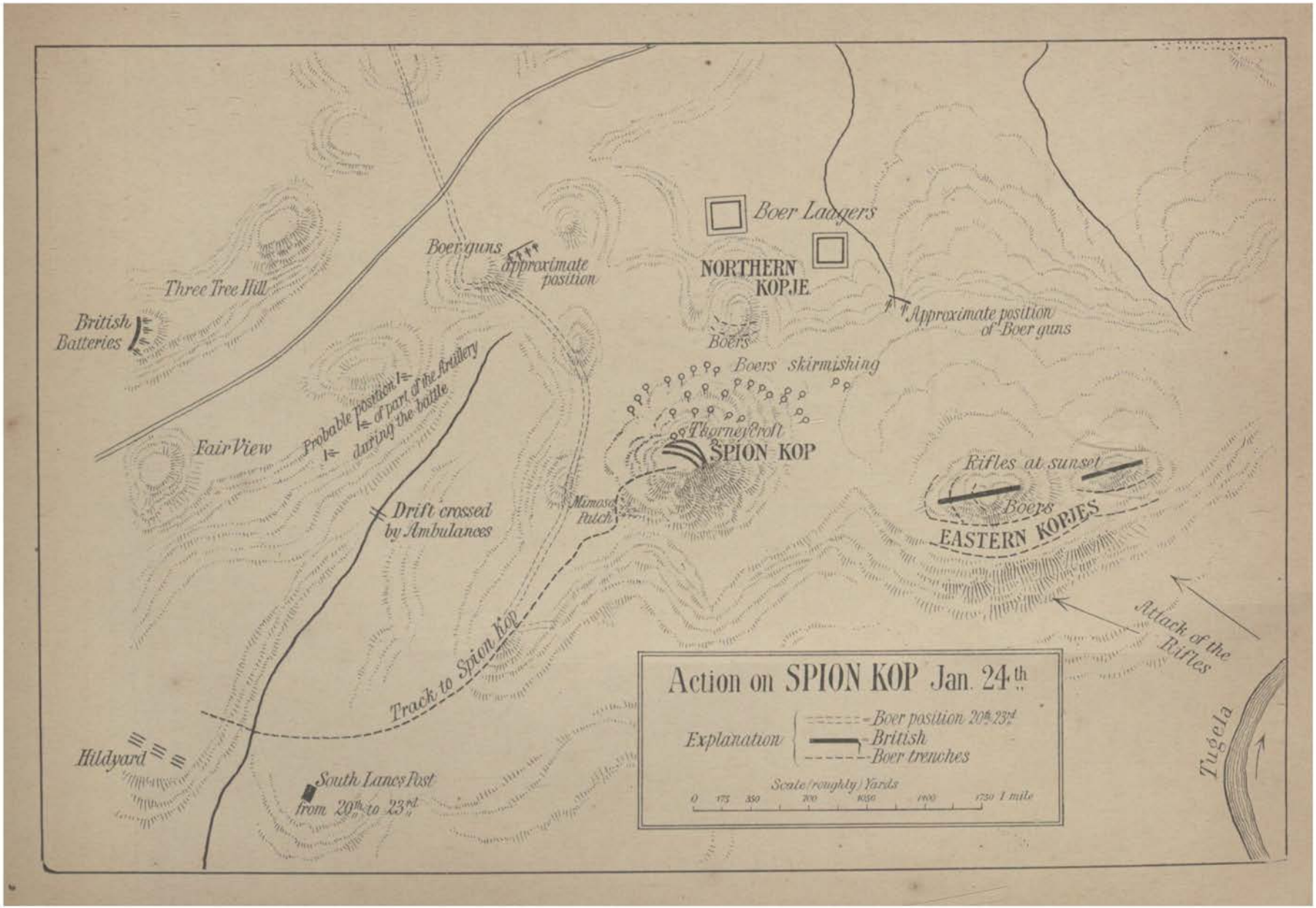
[1] *Freeman's Journal*, July 10th. We do not know what despatch General Botha saw. It has not been given, so far as we are aware, to the English public.

could only act on his information, and if he believed the Boers were in really strong force at Acton Homes and along the hills it would have been an additional reason for abandoning the cross-march. At the same time, as long as the columns could have been kept out of artillery range and the posts between the bridges and Acton Homes judiciously selected and held in sufficient strength, there would probably not have been much danger of the Boers making good an attack either on the moving columns or the communications. They would, besides, have been too much occupied with the fear of being outflanked to pay much attention to the British line of retreat. Their attitude throughout the fighting was, except on Spion Kop, one of passive defence or cautious demonstration. On the other hand, such a line of posts would have greatly weakened the attacking force, and in the case of a reverse a retreat across the Boer front might have been a ticklish business. Briefly, though we hold with General Buller that the movement on Acton Homes was strategically the best, the difficulties of its execution had been greatly increased by General Warren's slowness, which had given the enemy time to concentrate to his flank. Yet it is hard to believe that they were insuperable or as great as those which he afterwards had to confront.

Of the fighting that ensued there is not much to be said. The first day (20th) was, so far as it went, successful enough. General Buller in his telegram expressed himself satisfied with the results of the next. On the 22nd, however, the howitzers failed to clear the enemy's trenches, and the attack on Spion Kop was only postponed in order to allow General Coke to reconnoitre the position.

There were three other alternatives before General Buller when this decision was arrived at. Either he might endeavour to storm the entrenchments in front of Warren with the bayonet—a desperate remedy at best—or recross the Tugela, or, changing his plan, try once more to turn the enemy's right. He appears to have favoured the last, but yielded to his subordinate.

By taking Spion Kop, Sir Charles Warren hoped to make the enemy's position untenable by fire effect. The expulsion of the Boers from their hills could be attained only by a vigorous offensive from the


Boer Laagers
Boer guns
approximate position
NORTHERN KOPJE
Three Tree Hill
British Batteries
Approximate position of Boer guns
Boers
Boers skirmishing
Probable position of part of the Artillery during the battle
Thorneycroft
SPION KOP
Fair View
Rifles at sunset
Boers
EASTERN KOPJES
Drift crossed by Ambulances
Mimosa Patch
Attack of the Rifles
Track to Spion Kop
Action on SPION KOP Jan. 24th
Explanation
Boer position 20th 23rd
British
Boer trenches
Scale (roughly) Yards
0 175 350 700 1050 1400 1750 1 mile
Hildyard
South Lancs Post from 20th to 23rd
Tugela

mountain-top, not by a passive occupation. Such an offensive would depend firstly on an effective gun fire, to be followed by an infantry attack on the enemy's positions. Theoretically, then, the occupation of the summit was but the first step in the execution of the plan. One requisite was a thorough knowledge of the ground, and this, owing to want of good maps and to the presence of the enemy, could not be obtained. It was quite uncertain when the column started if guns could be got up at all. That question was never absolutely decided. The only information forthcoming on this point is Mr. Winston Churchill's statement that late on the afternoon of the 24th the field artillery officers said that it was impossible, and that the naval officer said that he would try.[1] If, however, the route was impracticable for horsed guns, why were there no arrangements made for getting up the Naval guns as soon as the top was occupied by the infantry? It cannot be argued that the batteries on Three Tree Hill would have done the work as well as guns on the kop; for they had failed during the preceding days to silence the Boer fire. But if it was impossible to get guns up, and if the endeavour to do so on the evening of the 24th was a kind of forlorn hope, it was surely very doubtful policy to send infantry up Spion Kop at all? Could it be hoped that the Boers would tamely relax their grip on the hills because a small column of infantry had occupied a summit rather higher than any in their possession? Would they not rather bring every available gun and rifle to bear upon it, and was it to be expected that infantry could hold out against such overwhelming odds? In a word, should the hill have been occupied unless it was certain that guns could follow in support? If it was possible, why were they not sent up earlier?[2]

Another fatal deficiency was the want of sufficient cover. General Warren stated that the Engineers who accompanied Woodgate were employed until dawn on the preparation of trenches. Partly owing to fog, partly to the rocky nature of the ground, they failed completely in

[1] It is curious to note that the Mountain Battery, which could go wherever mules can climb, did not arrive from Springfield till the battle was almost over.

[2] The roadmaking perhaps had something to do with this delay; Woodgate's Engineers may have found the work harder than they had anticipated.

their task. When the light came the trenches were totally inadequate, badly placed, and open to enfilade.

Ignorance of the ground was, no doubt, largely responsible for the tactical errors of the day. General Buller, in a despatch from Spearman's Camp on the Saturday after the battle, says that the perimeter of the hill was too large. However this may have been—and we must suppose the remark to refer to the main ridge of the mountain—it is certain that the top of the kop itself was too small for the troops massed on it. One possible way out of this difficulty would have been to attack other parts of the ridge, as the Rifles did in the afternoon, and meet the Boers in open skirmishing order. A well-managed operation of this kind—and there were plenty of troops in the brigades of Lyttelton, Hildyard, and Woodgate to carry it out—would perhaps have cleared the whole of the mountain by dark. It would have been well worth the risk, for the success or failure of Buller's attempt rested upon the secure occupation of Spion Kop. The northern flanks once gained and the summit occupied by guns,[1] the enemy would have been compelled to retreat to avoid being cut in two. In order to effect this the left wing could have been safely depleted of troops, its extremity being withdrawn to Three Tree Hill, and part of Hildyard's and Hart's men being employed to complete and sustain the successes in the centre. An alternative, and perhaps a more feasible, plan would have been to make a general attack all along the Boer lines. This would have enabled us to develop our full strength, and forced the Boers to disseminate theirs, and to draw much of their artillery fire from Spion Kop. One obvious characteristic of the operations on the Upper Tugela was the employment of fractions of the British force which enabled the enemy to bring sufficient strength to bear on the decisive point and defeat us in details.

If want of guns and entrenchments and the faulty disposition of the troops were the immediate causes of the heavy loss and subsequent

[1] A published letter from an officer may be quoted in support of this estimate of the military value of the kop:—"Spion Kop would have been of decisive value as a gun position, and valuable also in conjunction with the general attack." In a word, it was an artillery and not an infantry position.

evacuation, want of system in the transmittal of news and in the arrangement of command were no less apparent. To these errors of administration the reverse was largely due. Redistribution of command is bound to occasion dislocation in the mechanism of an army, the most delicate machine that exists, and the unavoidable friction was enormously aggravated by Sir C. Warren's most unfortunate omission to inform Coke of Thorneycroft's appointment.

As regards the sending of reports it was clearly impossible to keep the signallers on the hill-top, and later in the day a station was established lower down. But even then the service appears to have been most irregular and unreliable, for only so can we explain the fact that most of the messages appear to have gone unreceived or unacknowledged. The failure of the oil supply was another instance of inadequate provision or arrangement. It would have been well, so soon as no answer was returned to the signals, to send one or more staff officers up the hill to convey as rapidly as possible the state of affairs to the General below. The only officer thus employed by Sir C. Warren appears to have been Lieut-Colonel à Court, and he came down early in the morning, before the wounding of Woodgate, with the report that all was secure. It would have been still better, as Lord Roberts pointed out, if Sir Charles Warren had gone up to see for himself. Students of the campaign of Jena will call to mind the conduct of Napoleon under somewhat parallel circumstances upon the Landgrafenberg. The Emperor was commanding ten times as many troops as Sir Charles Warren, and these were spread over a far greater extent of country. Yet he did not hesitate to place his own headquarters on the plateau, to personally supervise the improvement of the road for his artillery, and above all things to inspect for himself the character of the ground to which the possession of the Landgrafenberg gave access. The great bulk of his army was still on the right bank of the Saale, but he left it behind him in order to be at the point on which he foresaw that everything would pivot. Such a point was Spion Kop; and Sir Charles Warren, having pinned his hopes of success upon a lodgment there, should, especially in view of the inferior maps, have taken the earliest opportunity to go to the summit himself.

BRINGING DOWN THE WOUNDED FROM SPION KOP

As to the course of the action itself there can be no two opinions. The British were out-fought from first to last. The artillery completely failed. Throughout the day they fired from the neighbourhood of Three Tree Hill,[1] and once, at about eleven o'clock, succeeded temporarily in silencing some of the enemy's guns; but the latter were for the most part invisible, and the shells had to be distributed over the numerous ridges and dongas on the chance of making a hit. Under such conditions the damage done to the enemy was infinitesimal. It is alleged that some of our shrapnel aimed at the northern parts of Spion Kop burst among our own men, and that the Rifles especially suffered as they fought their way up the eastern kopjes. As far as the field batteries are concerned, this seems highly unlikely, for from Three Tree Hill to the eastern end of the ridge is fully 5,000 yards—too long a range for effective shrapnel. On the other hand, it is possible that the erring shell came from the naval guns on Spearman's Hill.[2] Such accidents are not uncommon at great ranges. The gunners never had specific objects on which to concentrate their fire, and it has been asserted[3] that throughout the day the artillery were handicapped by insufficient instructions. If so, it was but another instance of the want of organisation and system which operated so unfavourably on the defence.

The question as to whether or not Thorneycroft should have evacuated Spion Kop is one on which there will probably always be two opinions. The plain facts, at the moment when the order to retreat was given, were these: Thorneycroft's infantry were completely exhausted and in great confusion. In the darkness it was impossible to re-form them. Most of them were ready enough to go on fighting, but the necessary cohesion and discipline had been seriously broken up and shaken. We shall hardly misinterpret the words used by the Colonel to Mr. Churchill when we say that in his opinion the great mass of the troops could not have done more fighting without rest and reorganisation. On this point no one was more likely to be right than

[1] Some accounts state that they moved further forward before dawn, and the positions they may have occupied have been indicated on the map (p. 433).

[2] It has been stated, however, that the Naval guns refrained from shelling the north kopje for fear of hitting their own men.

[3] B. Burleigh.

the brave officer who had been in the firing line all day. No arrangements, as far as he knew, having been made to strengthen the position, he resolved to retreat. No doubt he was right in wishing to withdraw most of the infantry on the hill, but he should have waited until he had received orders from Sir C. Warren, especially after hearing from Captain Phillips the views of Major-General Coke. Had he done so the mountain-top would have been held; fresh troops with working parties and guns would have arrived; and the action renewed next morning with better chances of success. Time to thoroughly complete the preparations for the defence might have been lacking, but the guns[1] would have been in position, schanzes properly placed, and the superfluous troops removed. When Sir Charles Warren became aware of Colonel Thorneycroft's action it was too late to remedy it. No exact information,[2] however, is forthcoming as to the hour when the order was issued, or when Mr. Churchill brought word that guns and working parties were on their way. In spite of this intelligence Colonel Thorneycroft did not countermand his order. Either it was too late to change, or the reinforcements announced by Mr. Churchill did not in his view materially alter the situation.

The Boer tactics were those of Majuba. Their guns and long-range rifle fire cramped and disconcerted the defenders, while their advanced parties strove to overwhelm them by musketry at close range and by even more desperate methods. The actual loss was mainly due to shell, of which the quick-firing Krupp fired no less than 454, and the Vickers-Maxims about 1,000 a-piece. An interesting comparison of the methods of Boer and English riflemen is contained in the letter of a German officer.[3] He says: "The distance between Boers and English had not from the commencement exceeded 300 metres. At some points they were only 100 to 150 metres apart. The Boers showed admirable coolness, and fired only when they could safely disengage themselves,

[1] The whole argument in favour of the retention of Spion Kop is based upon the supposition that guns could have been got up.

[2] Probably the retirement began about 10 p.m. At 2.30 a.m. when signalling communication had been re-established, it was too late to get the Naval guns up, and most of the troops had already withdrawn. (See Lord Robert's despatch.)

[3] Von Estorff.

whereas there was great unsteadiness (*Unruhe*) amongst the English. . . . The English artillery, especially the heavy naval guns, endeavoured to reach our artillery, but always shot too far. . . . The small losses of the Boers are perfectly intelligible to any one who has seen them fight; just as are the great losses of the English. The Boers fight in a thin line, while the English fight in the deep formation, still unfortunately practised in Germany. Each line of skirmishers has its own supporting troops behind it. . . . Most of the losses took place when these supports were brought forward. Further, with the English, as with us, the range is given by the officer; the result of which is that each man feels it his duty to fire, whether he sees anything or not, while the Boer only shoots when he can hit his enemy. He does not fire when his enemy fires, but utilises the intervals in the firing, shooting as soon as he sees a head. If the enemy's fire is very heavy he lies with his head on the ground behind his rock, and waits, keeping a look-out round the corner—one man only out of a group who happen to be lying together acting as watchman—and always has his rifle in a position to aim quickly and to fire. His strength lies, in fact, in presenting quickly, getting his aim immediately, and firing and disappearing at once under cover."

Considered as a whole, the failure of the operations appears to have been due partly to lack of adherence to one plan, partly to slowness in execution, but mainly to want of sufficient vigour[1] in following up a primary advantage. At Potgieter's, at Trichardt's Drift, at Acton Homes, and at Spion Kop we had won the first move; at each the game was lost through over-deliberation and to a want of perception of essentials. We have no wish to underestimate the difficulties. They were great. Clear insight and unresting energy were required to overcome them, and these were wanting to the British leadership. No one can help regretting with Lord Roberts that the Commander-in-chief did not rely more fully on his own judgment, and only assumed the direct command when the time for victory had gone by.

[1] It will of course be clearly understood that these remarks do not apply to the brave officers who bore the burden on Spion Kop. So far as our information extends, both Thorneycroft and Coke did everything in their power to better the *damnosa haereditas* given into their hands.

CHAPTER XX

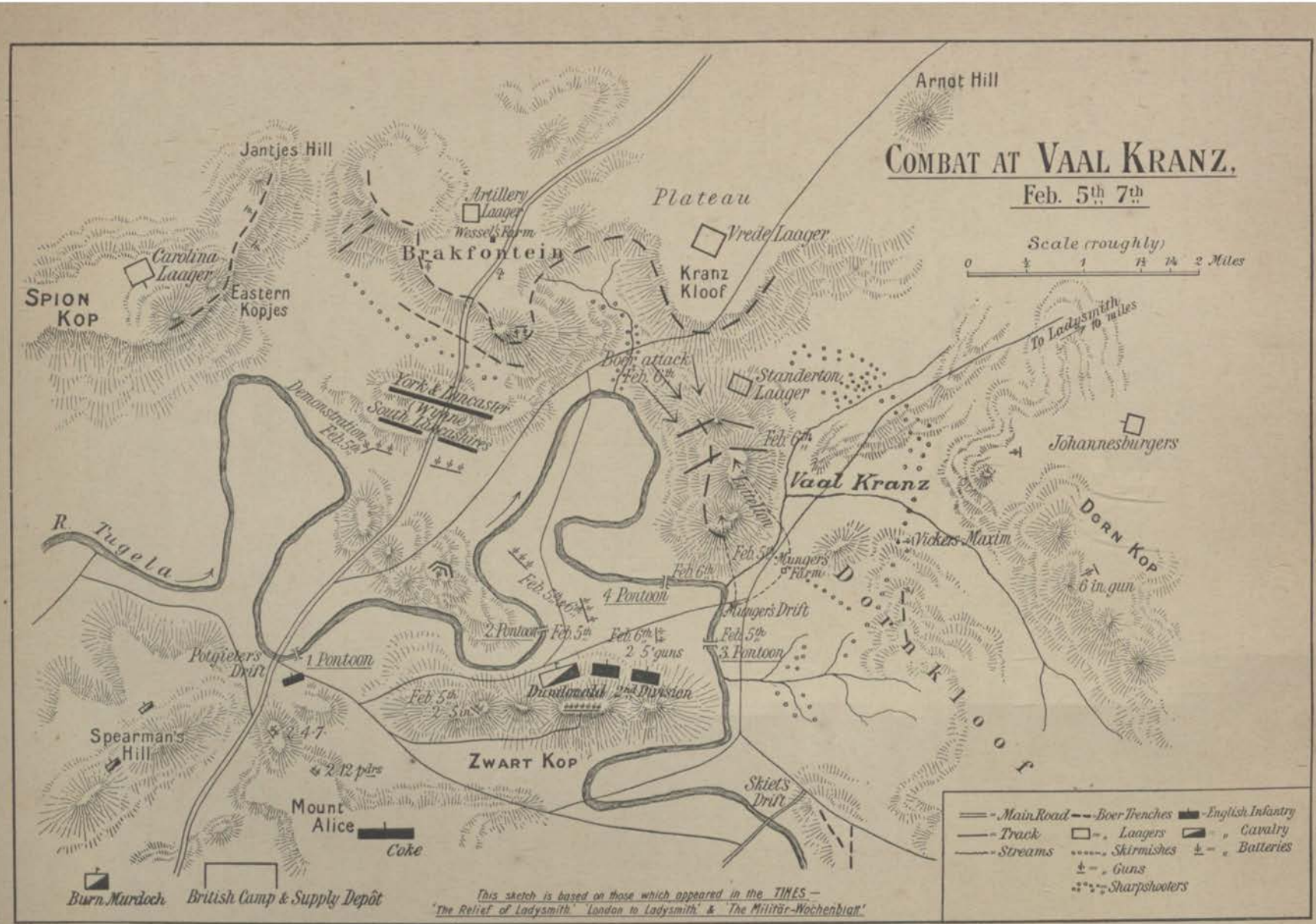
VAALKRANZ

AFTER SPION KOP—STRATEGICAL POSITION—ADVANTAGES OF BULLER—SPIRIT OF THE ARMY AND OF THE GARRISON OF LADYSMITH—THE BOER POSITIONS—BULLER'S NEW PLAN—DETAILS—THE GUNS ON ZWARTKOP—FEBRUARY 5TH DEMONSTRATION—ADVANCE OF THE INFANTRY AND FIELD BATTERIES—BOMBARDMENT OF BRAKFONTEIN—DELAY WITH PONTOON NO. 3—RETIREMENT OF WYNNE'S INFANTRY—ARTILLERY DUEL—THE 78TH—1.40 P.M. THE BRIDGE THROWN—ARTILLERY AGAIN IN ACTION—DEVELOPMENT OF LYTTELTON'S ATTACK ON VAALKRANZ—CAPTURE OF THE HILL BY THE DURHAMS—THE RIFLE BRIGADE—ESCAPE OF THE BOER POMPOM—THE CENTRAL KOPJE TAKEN—HALT FOR THE DAY—FEBRUARY 6TH BOMBARDMENT OF VAALKRANZ—THE BOER 6-IN. GUN ON DORNKOP—BOER ATTACK ON VAALKRANZ IN THE AFTERNOON—DURHAMS IN CONFUSION—THE 60TH RIFLES DRIVE OFF THE BOERS—HILDYARD REPLACES LYTTELTON—NIGHT ATTACK ON HILDYARD REPULSED—MORNING OF 7TH—BOMBARDMENT RENEWED—BULLER RESOLVES TO RETREAT—RETURN OF THE ARMY TO SPRINGFIELD—COMMENTS—BULLER'S INFORMATION—RAPIDITY ESSENTIAL—DELAY ON THE 5TH FATAL—FAILURE TO DEVELOP HIS STRENGTH—WAS HE RIGHT TO RETIRE?—DIFFICULTY OF BREAKING AN ENEMY'S CENTRE IN THE FACE OF MODERN WEAPONS

ONCE again, as after an unsuccessful attempt to storm a fortress, Buller's army drew back from the breach it had so nearly forced and returned to its camps at Springfield and opposite Potgieter's. Once again, like a beleaguered garrison the enemy made no effort to pursue. The fierce fighting of the preceding week dwindled into slight affairs of outposts, the British scouting and feinting from Honger's Poort to Hlangwane, the Boers throwing raiding parties over the central drifts and making a show of crossing at Colenso. The reconnaissances at Chieveley went on as usual. Barton's force which had threatened Colenso on January 15th, Robinson's Drift on the 19th, and Hlangwane on the 23rd, continued the old tactics of cannonade and patrol.

The best proof of the purely defensive character of the enemy's operations was his careful abstention from an attack upon this isolated body of 4,000 men. The days after the repulse at Spion Kop would have been utilised by a more powerful and adventurous foe to con-

centrate his whole available force against the British communications. But Botha was too weak in men to attempt such an operation, and General Buller was perfectly safe in remaining where he was. He still held in his own hands the power of the initiative, and, by continuing to threaten the Boer right, prevented him from turning upon Barton. Had the enemy done so the latter, well entrenched and armed with powerful guns, would have resisted his assault long enough to enable his chief to make a fresh attack from the Potgieter side or to march directly to his assistance. All that the Boer general could do was to strengthen his positions to the uttermost, and hold the mass of his burghers in the plain west of Ladysmith in instant readiness for a dash to the next threatened point. Strategically our position was far better than after Colenso, morally it was hardly a whit the worse. Ladysmith indeed had suffered a bitter disappointment. The garrison had eagerly watched the slow progress of the week's struggle. They could see the flash of the guns on Mount Alice, the British shells bursting along the ridges, and distinguish the fountains of brown earth thrown up by the lyddite. Nearer still they could watch the movement of the Boer reserves, and hope changed to conviction when on the morning of the 25th the waggons were seen hurrying westwards and northwards in apparent confusion and dismay. Then came the inexplicable cessation of the fighting, the three days' silence, and finally the truth, dooming them to more hardship and uncertainty. But there was no despondency amongst the men of the Relief Column. Never in English history has the private soldier more clearly realised his task or cherished a stronger resolution to perform it. Sullenly as the men had descended from Spion Kop, there was no sense of discouragement in their sturdy ranks. Wrath that they had failed dominated the sense of failure. It needed not the assurances or the well-earned praises of their Chief to stimulate their courage or strengthen their determination. They only desired to be led back to the attack of those seemingly impregnable hills at the earliest possible moment. They were ready to face any difficulty and to endure any loss so long as Ladysmith could be saved, and it was in a spirit of strong confidence and intense delight that after a week's rest they turned once more towards the Tugela.



This sketch is based on those which appeared in the TIMES —
'The Relief of Ladysmith' 'London to Ladysmith' & 'The Militär-Wochenblatt'

The front of the Boer army, in so far as it was defined by entrenchments, lay opposite the position of the British, occupying the whole range of heights from Trichardt's Drift to Skiet Drift, a distance measured in a straight line of nearly nine miles. This space was defended by fully fourteen miles of carefully laid-out trenches. These were 5 feet deep 2½ feet broad, and provided with sitting places at intervals of thirty yards. At important points they were further protected with mealie bags and loopholed, and where the ground was rocky stone schanzes were substituted. Exposed parts of these works were protected by head-covers of earth and corrugated iron. These entrenchments, which must have been the work of thousands of men,[1] ran from Bastion Hill to Spion Kop, and thence along Jantje's Hill, round the lower tableland of Brakfontein to the steep kopje east of the main road from Potgieter's, and north-eastward again along the great curve of Kranz Kloof. South of this, round the north-eastern end of the Zwartkop loop and for a mile and a half beside the river bank the Boers held the advanced hill of Vaalkranz which dominated the road from Skiet Drift to Ladysmith. Their extreme left rested on the trenches above the Drift itself. A gap of low and broken ground stretched for over two miles between Vaalkranz and the rugged mass of Dornkop, which overlooked the highest point of Spion Kop by several hundred feet. The works above Skiet Drift, Dornkop, and the valley between it and Vaalkranz were at this time comparatively weakly held.

There was no reason for supposing that a second attack on Bastion Hill or Spion Kop would have a chance of success. The circuitous route by Honger's Poort had the disadvantages of length, bad communications, and very difficult country. Unless General Buller totally changed his direction and moved back to Colenso or to the country east of the railway, he would have to select some point between Spion Kop and the old battle ground of December 15th.

He chose the Vaalkranz gap. By penetrating with his main force at this point between Vaalkranz and Skiet Drift he would turn the left of Brakfontein, cut off the Transvaalers from their direct line of

[1] Probably Kaffirs.

SUMMIT OF VAALKRANZ

retreat, from their comrades at Ladysmith and those on Grobler's Kloof. He could operate by a road which led direct to Ladysmith through comparatively easy country. From a tactical point of view Zwartkop offered a fine position for his artillery. Before, however, the thrust could be delivered, it was absolutely necessary to drive the Boers from Vaalkranz and occupy it strongly with guns and infantry. On this pivot his whole army would swing, until, instead of facing eastwards towards Dornkop it would front north and north-west. It would then depend on the enemy whether General Buller would be able to cut their northern line of retreat, fight a battle in front of Ladysmith, or relieve the town without further opposition. To the success of the operation two things were essential. Firstly, Vaalkranz would have to be held in strength; secondly, the movement would have to be executed so swiftly that the enemy would not have time to meet it in the valley, or render progress impossible by operating against its flank from Dornkop. Speed was all the more necessary because the door could be closed by Boers coming from Ladysmith or Grobler's Kloof as well as from Brakfontein.

[1] The details of General Buller's plan seem to have been the following:—Wynne's (late Woodgate's) Brigade was to relieve Lyttelton, who still held the Red Kopjes beyond Potgieter's, and with six batteries of Field Artillery, the 61st Howitzer Battery, and two 4·7 and two 12lb. Naval guns on Mount Alice, demonstrate vigorously against the Brakfontein plateau.

While this feint was in progress a pontoon bridge was to be thrown at the angle of the river, under the eastern end of Zwartkop, so as to provide the demonstrating force with a passage to the flat ground inside the Zwartkop loop. By this, when the object of the false attack had been gained, the six field batteries were to cross, and taking up a new position open fire upon Vaalkranz and the Dornkloof Valley. At the same time a second pontoon was to be thrown in the

[1] Since Spion Kop the army had received reinforcements of 2,400 men, consisting mostly of infantry drafts, a R.H.A. battery, two 5-inch siege guns throwing a 50lb. lyddite shell, and part of the 14th Hussars. The losses of the previous fights were therefore more than replaced.

GETTING THE NAVAL GUNS UP ZWARTKOP

river bend half way between Vaalkranz and Zwartkop. Here Lyttelton's Brigade was to pass, wheel northwards, and storm Vaalkranz. The hill captured, the field batteries were to follow, secure the position, and support the attack of Clery's Division (Hildyard and Hart) along the lower ground to the eastward. Colonel Burn Murdoch with the regular Cavalry [1] was to protect the left flank and observe the upper drifts, and Dundonald with the irregulars,[2] was to cover Clery's right, and get as far forward as he could. The movement was to be further supported by a powerful force of artillery on Zwartkop.[3] Coke's Brigade, minus the Imperial Light Infantry, who were told off to guard the camp, was to be in reserve. Thus three brigades of infantry, perhaps 10,000 strong, seven field batteries, one horse, one mountain, and one Howitzer battery, and twelve long-range guns, in all seventy-two pieces, and about 1,200 mounted men were to be suddenly thrown in a mass upon the enemy's weakest point, crush all direct resistance, open the road to Ladysmith, and threaten the Boer line of retreat.

The 3rd and 4th of February were spent in the preliminary movements, and by the night of Sunday Wynne had replaced Lyttelton beyond Potgieter's; and Hildyard, Hart, the Field Artillery, and the Cavalry were massed to the southward ready to move into position. Zwartkop has two main eminences on its long broad ridge; the higher and more eastern of these was occupied by the Mountain Battery, the two 15-pounders and the six Naval 12-pounders. They were for the present hidden behind a thick patch of cactus and mimosa, the stems of the trees being nearly cut through in order to save time in unmasking the guns when the moment came to open fire. On the lower kopje were the two 5-inch siege guns. In spite of a track made by the Engineers, the hoisting of the heavier pieces up the steep rocky side of the hill had only been accomplished by tremendous exertions on the part of the Bluejackets, who hauled up

[1] Royals, 13th and 14th Hussars.

[2] South African Light Horse, Thorneycroft's M.I., Composite Regiment M.I., Bethune's M.I., and the Colt Battery.

[3] No. 4 Mountain Battery, six Naval 12-pounders, two 15-pounders of the 64th Battery R.F.A., and the two 5-inch siege guns.

GUNNERS HAULING UP AMMUNITION FOR THE BATTERIES ON ZWARTKOP

the ponderous weapons by means of steel hausers and tackles fixed to trees. The whole had reached the top without damage, though one 12-pounder was upset, and several mules of the Mountain Battery had fallen headlong down the slope, one being killed. The heavy ammunition was carried up by men of the Scottish Rifles.

The demonstration was to have begun at daybreak (5 a.m.) on the 5th, but mist caused an unfortunate delay, and it was seven o'clock before the Naval guns on Mount Alice opened fire on Brakfontein and Vaalkranz at ranges of 9,000 and 7,500 yards. Two hours later Wynne's infantry began their advance from the red kopjes, the York and Lancaster being in the first line and the South Lancashires in support. Extending on either side of the main road they went steadily forward, followed by the six field batteries under Colonel Parsons. The 78th was on the left; the others prolonged the line in the following order: 73rd, 63rd, 19th, 7th, and 28th, the left brigade division being the most advanced. Four companies of the Somersets guarded the bridge and occupied the kopjes Wynne had left.

The infantry went on till they got within about a mile of the Boer trenches, when a dropping rifle fire opened upon them, and they lay down. The batteries took up a position in their rear and commenced throwing shrapnel upon the tableland in their front. Further back near the kopjes the howitzers also came into action, so that forty-six guns were now at work against the Boer centre. For a long time the enemy made no reply, though the batteries presented a fine mark within easy range of their heavy artillery. They seemed to be awaiting a nearer approach, a proof that for a time they believed that the advance heralded a serious attack. The British batteries fired continuously, directing their aim up every trench line and on the Boer riflemen crouching in the lower dongas. Despite the slow rate of fire a constant stream of shells crashed upon the hills, the shrapnel marked by airy puffs of smoke, the lyddite by dense brown columns of earth and dust. Here and there Boers could be seen running to shelter; others could be seen moving eastwards as though they already expected an attack in that direction. Meanwhile preparations were making for the passage of the river. No. 2 Pontoon was thrown comparatively early in the day, but delay

occurred in the case of No. 3, which Lyttelton was to use. At 10 a.m. the Zwartkop battery opened fire. The Light Brigade marched out into the loop to cover the bridge-throwing, and at the same time the 2nd Division began to form under the hill. The general direction of the English attack was therefore declared three hours before the advance could begin, for the pontoon was not ready till 1.40. The working party was covered by the fire of the Scottish Rifles. Thanks to the high scarped banks and the bend of the stream at the point chosen, the operation was completed with comparatively little loss, but eight of the Engineers were wounded by rifle fire in the forty minutes during which the work was in progress. Fourteen pontoons were required, the width of the stream being about eighty-five yards.

A little before noon the enemy, either goaded by our cannonade or realising that the troops in their front did not intend to come nearer, suddenly opened a tremendous fire. How many guns the Boers had in action is uncertain, but there were certainly two[1] on Spion Kop, and probably three or four others on Brakfontein. They were of heavier calibre than our fifteen-pounders and were firing from a great elevation. A Vickers-Maxim appears also to have taken part in the cannonade. In quick succession percussion shells stuck near the batteries and the infantry, throwing up clouds of smoke and dust and nearly hiding them from view. Then, the range found, shrapnel was substituted and the bullets fell thickly, stirring the surface of the plain like a charge of small shot splashing on water. The moment for a withdrawal had not yet come and the thirty-six field guns replied vigorously. Unable to locate and in some cases to reach the enemy's cannon our gunners stuck stubbornly to their task, and succeeded in drawing most of the Boer shells upon themselves, and so relieving the infantry.

Noise is a great element in modern battle, and the "annihilating voice" of artillery, together with its immense range, has a moral effect out of all proportion to the material damage it inflicts. The duel now in progress was the most violent that the campaign had yet seen, but the losses inflicted were very small. They fell almost entirely on the

[1] One of them was a quick-firing French gun of the Schneider pattern.

larger target. For every battery on the plain there was one gun in action on the hills, yet there is no question that the advantage rested with the latter, which possessed hidden and more lofty positions and superior range. The British guns were outclassed, and that through no fault of the men who worked them. Our short casualty list was probably in part due to the bad quality of the Boer shells. It was the left brigade division which suffered most, for it was raked in front by the guns on Brakfontein and in flank by those on Spion Kop. The 78th, which was on the outer flank, wheeled to reply, but the range was too long and the enemy's fire very rapid and accurate. Colonel Montgomery and Captain Dawson were hit, the latter having his foot half torn off, but the losses of the artillery did not amount to twenty men, and when the order to retire was given all the guns were got safely away, though one ammunition waggon was left without horses and had to be wheeled away by the men of the detachment.

At about one o'clock the infantry began to fall back pursued by a dusty whirlwind of striking shells and bullets. The retirement, described in the Boer bulletins as a disorderly rout, was well conducted, the York and Lancaster losing one man killed and twenty-one wounded, the South Lancashires five wounded. The left wing of the artillery next withdrew by batteries, at intervals of ten minutes, the 78th falling back by sections; the right wing followed, and by about 2 p.m. the demonstrating troops had withdrawn, the infantry to the Red Kopjes, the artillery to Pontoon No. 2, by which they gained the Zwartkop flats. They at once took up a new position opposite Vaalkranz and Munger's Drift and began shelling the ridge and the dongas with great severity. Their appearance marked at once the end of the first and the beginning of the second part of the operation—the attack on Vaalkranz.

As soon as the bridge was ready the Durham Light Infantry crossed and moved northwards under cover of the river bank. Colonel Woodland's task was to cross the spruit running below the ridge and attack its southern end. On his right were to move the 2nd Rifle Brigade under Colonel Norcott. The King's Royal Rifles and the Cameronians were to follow in reserve.

SAVING AN AMMUNITION WAGGON

An incident during the attack on Vaalkranz

A short distance from No. 3 pontoon the river bed opened out. The leading battalion, no longer protected by the broken banks, debouched into the open, and its advanced companies extended at the double over some mealie fields. From Munger's Farm, from the Dornkloof dongas, from the ravines eastward of Vaalkranz, and from the ridge itself, came a dangerous and persistent rifle fire, which caused frequent casualties, though it in no way broke the vigour of the advance. The 2nd Rifle Brigade dashed on in support, four companies under Major Lamb moving towards Munger's Farm, and four under their Colonel following in the track of the Durhams.

The base of Vaalkranz was only about half a mile from the pontoon bridge, but it took an hour to reach. As the infantry advanced the enemy's fire rose to one unceasing roll of musketry, punctuated by the crash of guns. A Vickers-Maxim, near the centre of the valley, poured its stream of shells across the head of the attack, and other guns on Kranz Kloof and Dornkloof threw shell after shell into the Rifles as they pressed on through the mealies towards the low bouldered walls of the farm. The Boer riflemen in the ravines opposite the pontoon raked the right rear of the advanced battalions and threw a damaging hail of bullets upon the bridge itself, where the Scottish Rifles and 3rd King's Royal Rifles were passing to the aid of their comrades. Meanwhile the Zwartkop battery strove hard to crush the Mauser fire. The Mountain Battery assiduously shelled the dongas, and the long-range guns swept the summit of Vaalkranz, on the flanks and crests of which shrapnel from six field batteries was unceasingly bursting.

Steadily the attack gained ground. The Durhams took breath in the dongas near the foot of the ridge and fixed bayonets. It was 700 feet high, steep and rocky, its summit formed by precipitous knolls. Despite the tremendous fire of forty guns a small force of Johannesburgers still clung to its crest and shot fast into our men as with a loud shout they rushed upwards. As they climbed higher the Boers broke and fled. A few were shot, ten were taken prisoners, nearly as many were found killed by the shell fire, three decapitated bodies marking the work of lyddite. Amongst the

CAPTURE OF VAALKRANZ BY DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY

prisoners was a Kaffir who treacherously wounded the officer who had spared his life. Not a few of the defenders were natives.

The first kopje gained the Durhams found themselves divided from the next by a hollow, and towards it they pressed. But they were anticipated by the Rifle Brigade, who were now clambering up the eastern slopes and occupied the enemy's second position before their gallant comrades could reach it. They had carried out as difficult a task as the Durhams with equal brilliancy and endurance. Reaching Munger's Farm which the enemy abandoned on their approach about the time when the Durhams stormed the southern kopje, they swung leftwards, and, disregarding the flanking fire from the knolls to the east, pushed along the base of the ridge.

Suddenly from behind a rise in their front dashed the Vickers-Maxim which had striven to impede their advance. Disdaining to retire to the safety of Kranz Kloof it boldly galloped over open ground across the British front towards a knoll whence it might enfilade our troops on Vaalkranz. It was sighted by the gunners on Zwart-kop, and the Naval 12-pounders—for the range was too long for field guns—fired in rapid succession in the hope of disabling it before it vanished into safety. It was not often that a Boer gun offered such a mark, and as the shells dropped nearer and nearer to the flying target, the excitement became intense. But though the shots fell close upon its track the efforts of the Bluejackets were vain. Amidst the smoke and dust of the last shell it plunged into a donga and disappeared from view.

The right half battalion of the Rifles soon gained the foot of the nek, turned upwards, joined Colonel Norcott's companies on the ridge, and, in conjunction with him, seized the central kopje, the summit of which was broader than that which the Durhams had seized. Beyond it the hill rose into a third eminence, which bent westwards along the curve of the river and abutted to northward on the slopes leading up to the Kranz Kloof plateau, the last line of the Boer defences, and nearly a mile off from the height seized by the Rifle Brigade.

It was after four o'clock. The third or western kopje was ablaze with shell fire, and the smoke rolled back in dense volumes over

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF VAALKRANZ OPERATIONS

the heads of our infantry. Had reinforcements been at hand it is just possible that decisive advantages might have been won to the eastward. There were still two hours of daylight, but beyond occupying Munger's Farm with a body of Devons, no further movement was made. The advanced battalions commenced entrenching the central kopje, other portions of the brigade the southern. The reserves were kept along the western base of the ridge well under shelter, for during the last hours of the day the Boers brought a very heavy rifle fire to bear upon the eastern slopes, which together with the shell fire from the hollows of Dornkloof drove us from that side of the hill altogether. About 6 p.m. the sky became overclouded and the flash of the enemy's guns more easily visible, but though our artillery fired vigorously upon them it was too late to gain a decisive success. Rain fell at 7 p.m., and partially extinguished the grass fires, but the sound of conflict did not die away until 9 p.m.—when the weary troops, strewn along the hills, sunk into a broken repose.

The day had ended unfavourably for the British. Though the casualties had not exceeded 200 killed and wounded, it was clear that the enemy had already partially blocked the Dornkloof gap, that the Vaalkranz hill in no sense commanded the enemy's positions behind, but was rather commanded by them, and that, worst of all, the ridge was too steep and rocky to allow of guns being placed on it. The position in some degree resembled Spion Kop, but it was of far greater extent, and General Lyttelton took adequate precautions for the protection of the men. It was, however, clear that unless the Boers could be driven out of Dornkloof, and prevented from seriously harassing us from the heights above it, a retirement would be inevitable. Nevertheless No. 3 pontoon was strengthened and widened in the hope of getting guns across later, and every preparation was made for the further retention of the hill.

Nor were the Boers less active. They mounted a 6-inch Creusot on the heights of Dornkop during the night, and at daybreak opened a very heavy fire on Vaalkranz from all their guns and rifles, and kept it up for most of the day. For the greater part of the time the shell fire was intermittent and almost negligeable, but the Mauser

bullets made standing up suicidal, and the men were much tried by the heat and long-continued strain. The artillery as usual failed to silence the enemy's cannon. The 6-inch gun was mounted upon rails or some kind of disappearing carriage. Its long black muzzle was visible for about twelve seconds, while it was aimed and fired, but as our shells from a range of about 9,000 yards took eighteen seconds to reach it there was plenty of time to withdraw it. The two 5-inch siege guns were brought down into the Zwartkop flat, but could do no more than explode a magazine somewhere in the rear of the gun. Its own fire was more annoying than deadly. The shells were thrown in all directions, now on to Zwartkop, now into the camps, now on to Vaalkranz, but it does not appear to have caused five casualties among men or beasts throughout the day.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the Boer artillery, which had ceased at noon, reopened with great energy upon Vaalkranz. Under cover of this 600 burghers attempted to recapture that position. Feinting against the right of our outpost line which was held by the Rifle Brigade, the main attack suddenly burst upon the western side of the hill held by the Durhams, the 60th being in reserve behind them. Pushing rapidly forward from some dongas, and supported by a furious fire of musketry, the attacking party dashed at the picquet line, and by the vehemence of their onslaught drove it back in some confusion. Over the back of the western spur several hundred men came running back, and to watchers in the plain the moment appeared very critical.[1] Succour, however, was at hand. Four companies of the 60th with fixed bayonets closed the gap, the stubborn enemy fell back before the menace of their advance, and after a brief and angry interchange of fire, broke and vanished into the hollows whence they had come. The whole episode had barely lasted an hour.

At 5.15 Hildyard's brigade crossed above Munger's Drift by pontoon No. 4 (which had been brought across from No. 2), and at nightfall relieved the exhausted troops of Lyttelton. The latter had been in the front line for nearly thirty hours, and had suffered 217

[1] *To-day*, April 5th.

casualties, including Colonel Fitzgerald wounded, and Major Johnston killed. The brunt of the fighting had of course fallen on the Rifle Brigade and the Durhams, the former of whom lost eighty-one, and the latter eighty-eight.

Hildyard's occupation was not destined to be peaceful. All night sniping went on, and at twelve o'clock the enemy made a second resolute effort to capture the hill. Profiting by the light of burning grass they pressed vigorously for a time, but were beaten back by the East and West Surrey Regiments. At daybreak (February 7th) the bombardment

NAVAL GUNS ON ZWARTKOP

began afresh. Another 6-inch gun is reported to have been mounted on Dornkloof. Once again our guns totally failed to silence those of the defence. Hildyard remained all day on the hill, and the enemy's gun fire, though heavier than the day before, did not cause more than forty casualties. But, as on the Tuesday, no effort was made to employ the brigades of Hart, Coke, or Wynne, or to utilise the Cavalry who, together with the transport, were withdrawn in the course of the day behind Zwartkop.

That afternoon General Buller held a consultation. With the excep-

tion of General Hart[1] who advocated an attack on Dornkop, all were in favour of a retirement. Vaalkranz could not be utilised as an artillery position; it was isolated and exposed to Boer fire on every side except the south; the positions beyond were too strong to be attacked, and to hold on longer was a mere waste of life.

With the moral courage which he always showed, General Buller resolved, in spite of the disappointment of the army, to retreat. The supply train began to withdraw at 6 p.m.; Hildyard evacuated Vaalkranz at 11 p.m.; the general retreat began at eight in the morning of the 8th. The pontoons had been taken up, the heavy guns removed; Potgieter's, the scene of thwarted hopes, was abandoned, and the column, bitterly discontented, turned once more towards Springfield. The losses of the previous days amounted to 374 including twenty officers.

The Vaalkranz operations very clearly illustrate the special difficulties which the Relief Column had to overcome as well as the far-reaching modifications that long-range weapons have imposed upon offensive tactics. The former were the conformation of the country and the qualities and disposition of the Boer forces; the latter will be a permanent feature of future warfare, whether the scene of operations be the marshy flats of Poland or the rugged passes of the Vosges. When Sir Redvers Buller resolved to throw his army upon Vaalkranz and the gap to the east of it, he had to reckon with certain clearly defined facts and certain strong probabilities. He must have known, in the first place, that he was about to strike, not so much at the flank as at the centre of a loosely-held line which stretched from Acton Homes to Hlangwane, and was strongly fortified in his immediate front, along Spion Kop and Brakfontein, and east and west of Colenso. The intervening space, by occupying which both these entrenched sections would be turned, consisted of a rugged mass of country difficult to traverse and very easy to defend. From a tactical standpoint the weakest part was, so far as could be seen, the Vaalkranz gap. In the second place, General Buller must have realised[2] that the main body of the enemy

[1] B. Burleigh, p. 383.

[2] The news per heliograph from Ladysmith should throughout these operations have been of value.

lay scattered in a line of laagers in the comparatively flat country behind the hills from Ladysmith to Spion Kop, the actual positions being weakly held till the direction of an English attack had sufficiently declared itself. The different commandos would then converge upon the threatened point, so that unless the assault were not immediately successful, it would find itself opposed from either flank as well as from the front. By a successful assault we mean the capture of a point from which the army could develop its full strength and make the Boer positions untenable. Such a point would have been the ridge of Spion Kop, or, as was afterwards shown, the heights above Pieter's Station. Whether the Boers would attempt to fight in front of Ladysmith after the line of the Tugela had been lost, was another question. What we wish in this place to emphasise was the absolute necessity of seizing this decisive point before the covering Boer army could converge to prevent it. As at Acton Homes secrecy and rapidity were essential.

Sir R. Buller had to surprise the enemy. He could do this in two ways: firstly, by deliberately misleading them by a feint; secondly, by concealing his real object until everything was ready. I. He could demonstrate either above or below Zwartkop, at Trichardt's, which should have drawn the Boers further away from Vaalkranz than would a feint at Potgieter's; at the latter, where he would be able to employ the demonstrating troops more immediately in the real attack; or lower down the Tugela, a course which would probably not have offered so good a chance as a feint at either of the other points. He chose—and no one in England can challenge his decision—Potgieter's. We may point out, however, that by so doing he postulated a greater suddenness and unison in developing his real attack than by demonstrating at Trichardt's, because, supposing that he could have drawn the Boers towards Ventner's Spruit, it would have taken them a longer time to come back to meet his attack than if, as was actually the case, they had merely to ride across from Brakfontein to Dornkloof. And it may be added that in marching his army in one column to Potgieter's, he enabled the Boers, who were aware of his movement on the evening of the 3rd, to con-

centrate their whole available force on Brakfontein, even if they did not at once strengthen Dornkloof. On the other hand, by moving a strong column on Trichardt's (whence Zwartkop could have been easily and secretly reached in a night march) as well as to Spearman's, the Boers would from the beginning have been kept uncertain where the blow was to fall.

II. As regards concealment of plan, we find the English troops massing in sight of the Boers three to four hours before an advance could be made. So far as can be seen, these hours of delay, whether avoidable or not, decided the issue of the operation. The blow had to be struck in a day. By the morning of the 6th perseverance had already become questionable. By the afternoon of the 7th it was, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, too late. It would appear, too, that some effort should have been made to employ the 2nd Division and the Cavalry. Lyttelton certainly could not have been expected to penetrate the Boer lines alone. A second pontoon under Zwartkop would have enabled Hildyard's and Hart's men to begin crossing at the same moment as Lyttelton's, and so much ground might have been gained by nightfall on the 5th as to give a chance of victory on the following day. Insuperable difficulties[1] may have stood in the way of such a course, but it was clear that if success was to be achieved more than one brigade would have to be used simultaneously. It was equally certain that as broad a front as possible was desirable, so as to allow of a full deployment, secure the rear, and minimise the effect of flanking fire.

No doubt Sir Redvers was much disappointed to find that the positions beyond Vaalkranz were too strong to attack, and it is possible that had artillery been able to ascend the hill they might have driven the Boers from the north and east. But it is clear that the

[1] Bridging material may have been wanting. Three pontoon bridges were already in use, each probably averaging 80 yards in length. This, however, must have been foreseen. Another possible objection to a simultaneous movement over two bridges was that in case of a repulse from Vaalkranz the retreat of the 2nd Division might have been harassed, though hardly endangered, unless, as was scarcely likely, the Light Brigade had been so badly beaten as to be unable to keep the enemy in check. The artillery on Zwartkop would have made a close pursuit impossible.

plan was based on the co-operation of Clery and Dundonald, and that the failure to employ them at once on Lyttelton's right greatly endangered, if it did not altogether destroy, the chances of success.

We see no reason to suppose that the great gun on Dornkop in itself exercised a decisive influence upon the operations, but its appearance certainly showed that the Boers, who did not readily risk their heavy cannon, were in force on the lower spurs. To drive them from this tremendously rugged, extensive, and to us unknown, mountain mass, in which every donga formed an admirable trench, would have been a desperately difficult task. Official despatches have not been forthcoming, but we cannot think that General Buller contemplated this in the beginning. He rather hoped by rapidity to seize the plateau north and east of Vaalkranz, and so cut the enemy's line in two. Could he have accomplished this, there is good reason to believe that the Boers, rather than risk their communications, would have abandoned the Tugela.

It is at present not easy to understand why General Buller held on as long as he did, seeing that every hour lessened his chances. No doubt he abandoned the attempt with the greatest reluctance, and used every means in his power to find a way, though his efforts were not outwardly visible. That he was wise in retreating when he did there can be little doubt. The difficulties may be measured by the fact that the only alternative suggestion at present known to have been made to him was to attack Dornkop.

The above remarks will have failed in their object if they have not in some measure made clear the critical nature of the attempted operation. It is possible, though far from certain, that if on the 5th General Buller had been able to throw all his available troops across the river by ten o'clock in the morning, and boldly attacked on a front extending from Dornkloof to Vaalkranz, the enemy's line might have been broken. After mid-day the chances lessened almost hourly. The whole operation was, in fact, a nice question of time, and shows the difficulty of piercing the centre under modern conditions. Even if weakly held, the long-ranging weapons on the flanks will render advance very hazardous, if not impossible. At Vaalkranz the wings had time to close in upon the assailant before the gap was made.

CHAPTER XXI

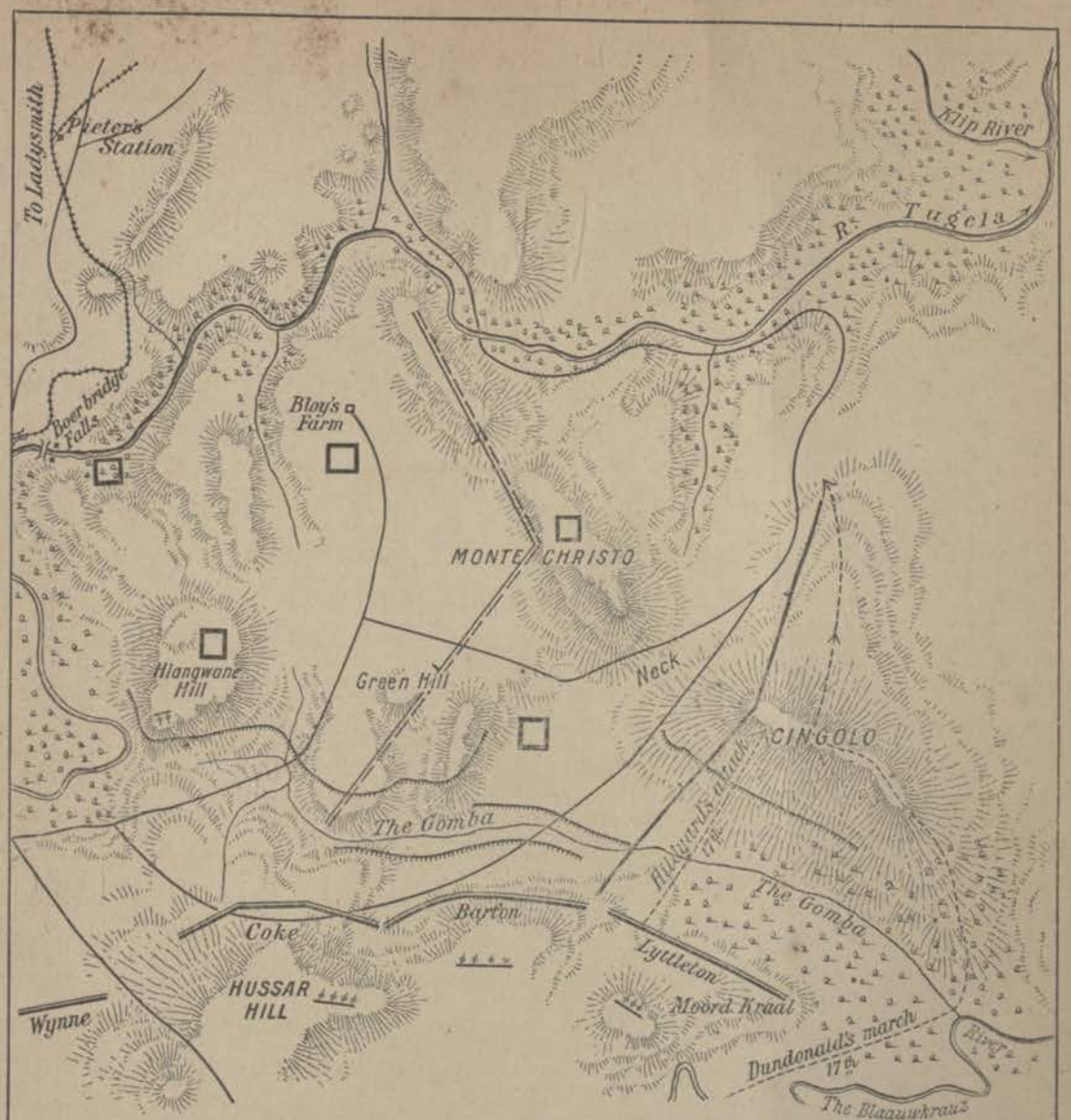
FOURTH ATTEMPT TO RELIEVE LADYSMITH—CAPTURE OF HLANGWANE AND MONTE CHRISTO

THE RETIREMENT TO SPRINGFIELD AND CHIEVELEY—A RETURN TO THE OLD GROUND—PROJECTED ATTACK ON THE BOER LEFT—RECONNAISSANCE TO HUSSAR HILL, FEBRUARY 12TH—THE BOER POSITIONS—OCCUPATION OF HUSSAR HILL, FEBRUARY 14TH—ADVANCE OF THE ARMY—FEBRUARY 15TH, ATTACK GIVEN UP ON ACCOUNT OF GREAT HEAT—FEBRUARY 16TH, EASTERN SPURS OF HUSSAR HILL OCCUPIED—FEBRUARY 17TH, ATTACK ON THE BOER LEFT—HEAVY CANNONADE ON BOER TRENCHES—A DELAYING ACTION—ADVANCE OF THE CAVALRY—A DIFFICULT MARCH—THE BOER FLANK ON CINGOLO TURNED—THE HILL OCCUPIED—FEBRUARY 18TH, ATTACK ON MONTE CHRISTO—THE HILL TAKEN—COMPLETE DEFEAT OF THE ENEMY—THE KEY TO HLANGWANE HILL TAKEN—FEBRUARY 19TH, HLANGWANE OCCUPIED—ABANDONED BOER CAMPS—THE ARTILLERY BROUGHT UP ON TO THE PLATEAU

THE retirement from Potgieter's had begun on February 8th, but it was not till the 10th that the rearguard, consisting of Major-General Coke's Brigade and Colonel Burn Murdoch's cavalry, abandoned the Red Kopjes and fell back to Springfield. To protect the bridge and to check the inroads of the enemy who were already reported to have crossed the Tugela each brigade of the 5th Division gave up a battalion, Wynne leaving behind the Lancashire Fusiliers and Coke the Imperial Light Infantry. These troops, with the three regiments of regular cavalry, two Naval 12-pounders and probably A Battery Royal Horse Artillery, stood fast on the Little Tugela, while the 2nd and 5th Divisions, Dundonald's Mounted Infantry, and all the rest of the artillery moved on Chieveley. Sir Redvers Buller had resolved to make an effort to the east of Colenso. Whatever the result, it would probably be the last, for the supplies in the town were running low, disease and starvation were increasing, and the Relief Column, which had done much heavy fighting during the past month, could not be expected to prolong its efforts indefinitely. Nevertheless, there

was no despondency among the troops as they turned their faces eastwards. They only asked to be allowed to decide the issue by a general action, to have one chance of bringing their whole strength to bear. The march was uneventful. Lyttelton, who had succeeded to the command of the 2nd Division after Sir F. Clery had been disabled by a fall from his horse, led the way, and encamped east of Chieveley. He had under him the brigades of Hart (5th), Hildyard (2nd), and Norcott, the latter now commanding Lyttelton's own Light Brigade (4th). Warren followed with Wynne (11th) and Coke (10th), and Lord Dundonald's cavalry covered the flank of the march to the northward. Parties of the enemy came over the river to watch the movement. On February 12th Bethune's Horse lost five horses, and Lieutenant Pilkington of the Royals was taken prisoner with six men while on patrol duty. The detachment was suddenly attacked in difficult country; Pilkington rode to the left to succour a party containing a wounded officer, and was captured. The same day, before the rearguard of the main column reached Chieveley, Lord Dundonald had commenced the new operations by a reconnaissance in force towards Hussar Hill. This widespreading ridge lies about four miles north-east of Chieveley, between the Blaauwkranz River and that Hlangwane range, which, since the first weeks of December, had formed the left of the Boer position at Colenso. It had gained its name as the scene of a skirmish in which a hussar had been killed some weeks earlier, and was, in fact, a kind of debatable ground between Barton's troops and the enemy. Its north-eastern spurs, running down into the angle formed by the Gomba stream and the Blaauwkranz, were some two miles south of the parallel but higher hills rising up to Hlangwane, Monte Christo, and Cingolo, and it was therefore a good point from which to examine the enemy's positions.

At 8 a.m. Lord Dundonald started with South African Light Horse, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, the Composite Regiment, the Colt Battery, one field battery, and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The hill was occupied without difficulty, a small Boer patrol being driven back with the loss of two wounded, and a strong picket line being thrown out round the captured ground. At noon Sir Redvers Buller arrived,



Sketch to illustrate operations on the Tugela.

Feb. 14th–20th 1900.

Scale ¼ ½ 1 2 miles

Explanation

- Railway
- Roads
- Water
- Wooded ground
- Boer camps and entrenchments as known to the British Staff before the attack.
- Outpost line on the night of Feb. 16th
- Outpost line on the night of Feb. 17th
- Outpost line on the night of Feb. 18th

N. B. The various positions are of course merely approximate. The sketch is based on the maps in 'London to Ladysmith', 'The Relief of Ladysmith' and also on that published by the Intelligence Division of the War Office. All these differ appreciably, and the sketch must be regarded rather as an aid to comprehension than as an accurate map of the Country. Mr Winston Churchill's map is fairly detailed, but does not include the mass of Cingolo or of Hussar Hill.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE COUNTRY BETWEEN COLENSO AND LADYSMITH (APPARENTLY TAKEN FROM THE RIDGE OF MONTE CHRISTO)

and for an hour examined with his telescope the hills in front. At 1 p.m., his observations being completed, the force was ordered to withdraw. As the advanced line fell back the dropping musketry from the dongas quickened into a sharp though harmless rattle, but the Boers made no attempt to re-occupy the ground till Dundonald had evacuated it. The rear of his column was 2,000 yards from the south-west edge of the hill before the enemy came back and opened a heavy rifle fire upon the hindmost squadrons. No one was hit, though the ground 200 yards in rear was blurred with spurting dust. The irregulars galloped to a ridge on the Chieveley side, dismounted, and returned the fire. The South African Light Horse were on the right, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry with two Maxims on the left. The Colt guns were in the front line, the Field Battery opened fire further back, and Major Gough's regiment and the Welsh Fusiliers wheeled about to return. But the skirmish, though lively, lasted only a short time. Under cover of the shell fire the Mounted Infantry fell back by squadrons, suffering in all a loss of twelve wounded, including one officer. The enemy, who lost one man killed besides wounded, made no attempt to pursue, and the force, its mission accomplished, returned to Chieveley.

The Hlangwane hill region lies south of the Tugela, its spurs extending some dozen miles east of Hussar Hill, and gradually lowering to the junction of that river and the Blaauwkranz. The western portion of this the enemy had carefully entrenched

and held strongly enough to resist a *coup de main*, though it appears doubtful whether there were ever more than 4,000 men to hold the half-dozen miles of trenches and schanzes above the Gomba stream. This section of the Boer lines was connected with the Colenso and Grobler's Kloof defences by a bridge thrown between the rapids and the waterfalls some three miles north-north-east of Colenso. The positions held were the following :—

The most western *point d'appui* was Hlangwane Hill, the summit of which, many hundreds of feet above the river, is nearly two miles east of the Fort Wylie loop. The upper flanks of the mountain facing west, south, and south-east, were defended by carefully prepared trenches and schanzes. East of Hlangwane the hills become lower and run eastward for two and a half miles in low, green, wooded slopes, called by our troops the Green Hill, to the Gomba stream. This southern front was also scored with trenches, some of which were distinguishable amongst the green of the hillside by the reddish colour of the upturned earth. The Green Hill abuts on a nek which opens out from north to south, and on either side of which rise the great ridges of Cingolo to the south-east and Monte Christo to the north-west. The Monte Christo, which overtops Hlangwane, runs to the bend of the Tugela, for a distance of about five miles, in a series of kopjes broken near the centre and highest towards the end overlooking the nek. From this extremity a heavy spur descends due northward to the river. On the other side of the nek, which was a mile wide, Cingolo rises sharply into a rugged succession of knolls, and throws off long, steep, densely wooded, boulder-strewn slopes which stretch down to the Blaauwkranz and spread out several miles eastward on to a lower plateau. The country is very ill-suited for moving troops, and perhaps this was one reason why the Boers only held Cingolo weakly, and concentrated their main strength to the westward, where a frontal attack (the only form of tactics they believed us capable of) would necessarily fall.

It was clear that if Sir Redvers Buller could win Cingolo and Monte Christo he would command the lower Hlangwane plateau, turn the Green Hill entrenchments, and almost certainly compel the enemy

HLANGWANE HILL

to abandon Hlangwane Hill itself. Then, the whole of this great mountain mass in his hands, he could dominate with his artillery the Colenso kopjes to the west, the hills in front of Pieters, and the low ridges between the Tugela and the Klip. Holding the interior lines, he could pass his army wherever and whenever he wished. The bend where Monte Christo descends to the river was in a straight line, six miles from the base of Isimbulwana, the last Boer position between him and Ladysmith, *i.e.*, only about half the distance between that town and Colenso. Above all, by seizing Hlangwane, the whole of the Colenso trenches could be turned, and the Boers forced to evacuate them or risk having their line of retreat cut off by an advance over the plateau west of the Klip. The possession of the Monte Christo range would actually place the British in the left rear of the Colenso defences. So much for the strategical advantages; the tactical we shall have to consider later.

The Intelligence Department, under the keen eye and vigorous control of Colonel Sandbach, R.E., had now gained a far greater efficiency than it possessed at the commencement of the campaign. In view of the proposed turning movement from the east he was able to place the following information at the disposal of his chief:—

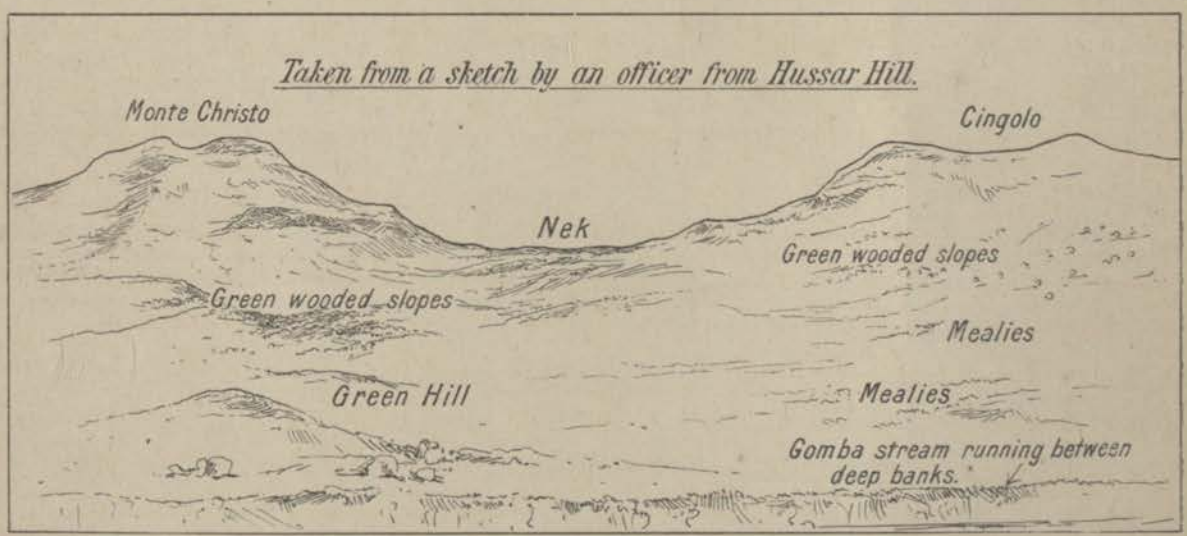
I. The enemy were reported to have five camps south of the Tugela, all within a three-mile radius of Hlangwane—one on Hlangwane; one on Bloys' farm; one on the north-west spur of Cingolo, north of the nek (apparently some part of Monte Christo); one near the waterfall; one in the Gomba bed. These marked the enemy's points of concentration, but they usually slept in the hills or dongas in the rear, the tents acting as "dummies" to draw fire.

II. The bridge behind Hlangwane was made of rails over loose stone piers, with sleepers as a roadway, and was broad enough for two men or horses to cross abreast. There was also a square punt moved across the river by a wire-rope, which was capable of holding twenty men.

III. Hussar Hill was frequently visited by the enemy, who occupied the dongas near the hill nightly. They also held the bed of the Gomba, and had improved the naturally good cover afforded by the ground by

artificial defences. North of the stream were some thirty schanzes; south of it a long trench. The earth from the trenches had been carried twenty yards in front of them, to conceal their real position. The Boers told off to occupy them would probably be concealed in the dongas behind until the British artillery preparation was completed. Shells, therefore, in rear of the flanks of visible defences would "probably delay their movements."

IV. There were certainly two guns on Hlangwane, one a long-range 3-inch Creusot, the other a quick-firing one-pounder (pompom). Others might have been brought across. Six guns and two Maxims



OUTLINE SKETCH OF MONTE CHRISTO AND CINGOLO

were reported to be mounted on the ridges between the railway and the Ladysmith western road on the left bank of the Tugela, *i.e.*, north and north-west of Fort Wylie. These guns could bring fire to bear on Hlangwane Hill. One gun was reported on a kopje north-west of A. Pretorius's Farm (somewhere north of the Gomba stream). The slope of Cingolo facing the Gomba was reported to have been lately entrenched; guns, though not reported there, might be expected.

It was, we must suppose, on this information, which was both accurate and complete, that Sir Redvers Buller based his scheme.[1]

[1] Colonel Sandbach's report appeared in a letter of Mr. B. Burleigh's. It was arranged rather differently to the four paragraphs in the text.

On February 14th at daybreak a general movement upon Hussar Hill began. Hart's Brigade, with the 6-inch Naval gun lately mounted on a truck, and four Naval 12-pounders, was left at Railhead, north of Chieveley. The 2nd Division was on the right, Barton's Brigade in the centre, the 5th Division on the left. The mass of the artillery, including the 5-inch guns, the howitzers, and the rest of the naval twelve-pounders, moved with Warren. Dundonald's cavalry covered the front.

The advance began at daybreak, and the general tendency of the orders was that Hussar Hill should be occupied and entrenched so as to serve as a base for more extended operations. The fighting along the front of the cavalry screen was sharp and constant, and at about eight o'clock Barton pushed the Welsh and Irish Fusiliers forward, supporting them with the Irish. The Field Batteries also got to work, and finally succeeded in driving the enemy from the more exposed parts of the hill into the thickly wooded eastern spurs and hollows. At 10 a.m. four Boer guns and a pompom opened upon the plateau occupied by Warren's men and the artillery, and scattered shell in all directions, though the damage done was very slight. Some of the shell fragments bore the Woolwich mark. Meanwhile the advanced infantry entrenched the ground gained, and the action dragged on till close of day, with very slight loss to ourselves and probably still slighter to the enemy. Meanwhile Lyttelton's Division moved south of Hussar Hill along the valley of the Blaauwkranz. It appears that General Buller expected an attack from Hlangwane and Colenso, *i.e.*, his most vulnerable point, for early in the afternoon he sent Coke's Brigade further to the left. The Boers, however, made no movement, and firing ended at sundown.

On February 15th an advance was made towards the right. It appears that Barton was ordered to clear the eastern spurs of Hussar Hill, while the 2nd Division further to the right was to capture Cingolo. The Field Batteries opened at daybreak upon the various Boer positions, and about eight o'clock the Fusilier Brigade, together with the Queen's (Hildyard) and the Durham Light Infantry and Scottish Rifles (Norcott) advanced to the north-east and cleared

part of the ground south of the Gomba. By mid-day the Queen's had crossed this stream, but the attack was not pushed further owing, it is said, to the intense heat. There was hardly any water in the Gomba, and the Blaauwkranz was some way off. Indeed, in judging these operations it should be remembered that this want of water, together with the burning sun, was a most serious factor. A system of water-

BRIDGE OF SLEEPERS TAKEN UP FROM THE MAIN LINE OF THE NATAL GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS, THROWN OVER THE TUGELA BY THE BOERS

carriage by means of iron tanks borne by oxen only partially met the difficulty.

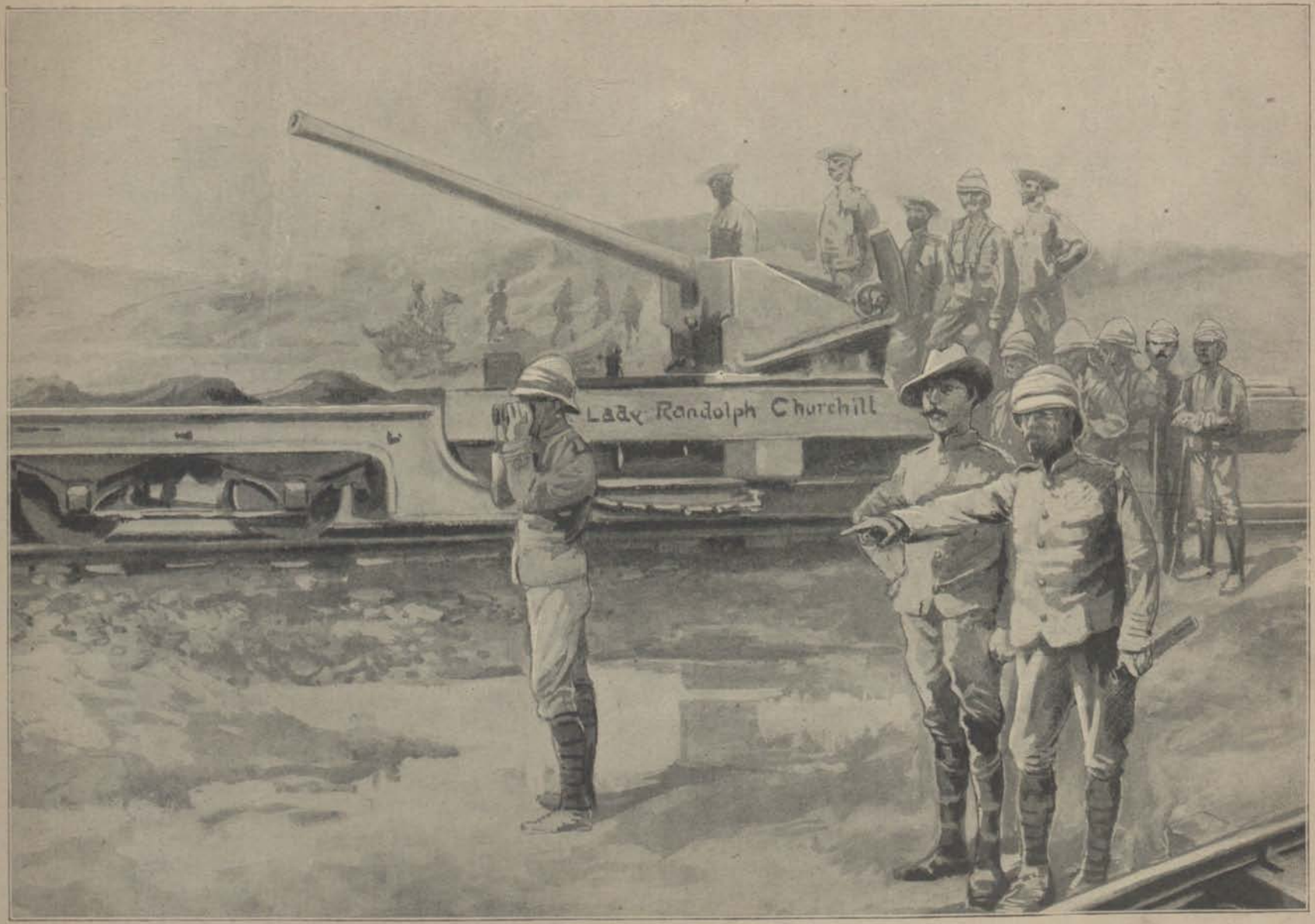
The night was broken by Boer sniping, and the 16th, like its predecessor, was passed under a very heavy shell fire. The line of batteries which had been established on Hussar Hill was swept by the 3-inch gun on Hlangwane and other cannon, nor did our gunners succeed in silencing their fire. For the most part their positions were unknown, while the British troops, as well as the

transport, were in lower and more open ground. However, as usual, the Boer fire did little damage, and in the afternoon some sharp infantry fighting resulted in our occupation of the whole of Hussar Hill. Early in the afternoon 400 Boers made a last effort to push us back. They descended from the slopes of the nek, and, coming on with determination, drove in the cavalry pickets and seized a low, rugged spur. Then the infantry supports advanced, and some howitzers and field guns poured lyddite and shrapnel upon the sharpshooters, who recoiled before the crashing of mimosa boughs and the whizzing of rock splinters and retired as fast as they had come. That night entrenchments were drawn firmly round the outermost verge of the hill, and orders were issued for a general attack at dawn on the next day.

The artillery were in position on Moord Hill, the eastern end of Hussar Hill, and thither on the evening of the 16th went the 10th Brigade, partly to act as escort to the guns, partly to support Barton. Four naval 12-pounders, two 5-inch siege guns, six 5-inch howitzers, and seven field batteries were to prepare the attack from Moord Hill, two 4·7-inch, one 6-inch Naval guns and six Naval 12-pounders were to lend their assistance from Gun Hill in front of Chieveley. Wynne's Brigade prolonged this line over Hussar Hill towards Hart. Lyttelton's Division, now bivouacking east of the Blauuwkranz, together with Dundonald's horsemen, was to strike the decisive blow on the right. The latter was to lead his nine squadrons over the river,[1] and plunging into the dense mimosa jungle at the foot of the southern slopes of Cingolo make a long *détour*, gain the south-eastern foot of the mountain, and force his way up to the crest. He would thus completely turn the Boer left, drive everything in front of him, and unite with Hildyard, Lyttelton's right Brigade, upon the very summit of the ridge.

All were in movement at dawn on the 17th, and as the Cavalry forded the Blaauwkranz the bombardment began. Under cover of a heavy cannonade Barton's Brigade, with the Somerset and Dorsets echeloned in rear of its left, pushed slowly forward towards the Gomba. Hildyard's leading battalion, the Queen's, advanced through the mealie fields against the western flanks of Cingolo, whilst his

[1] Which appears to have been easily fordable.



THE NEW RAIL-TRUCK 6-INCH NAVAL GUN

left joined hands with Barton and Norcott and threatened the nek. Westward of the artillery Wynne demonstrated in the direction of Hlangwane, so that over a front of four miles the British centre was fighting a delaying action while the storm slowly gathered upon the Boer flank. Meanwhile the great battery on Moord Hill, covered by the Middlesex battalion, concentrated a fire upon Green Hill that tore great gaps in the schanzes and trenches, rent the mimosa groves, and blurred the whole of the slope with smoke and dust. Not, however, till eight did the enemy attempt to reply to this devastating storm. Then their guns opened, and for an hour maintained a very rapid and accurate fire from Hlangwane and the Monte Christo foot-hills. The delay of the preceding days had enabled them to bring a 6-inch gun into action, and its huge missiles, intermixed with 3-inch and smaller shells, fell thickly amongst the field guns on the eastern spur, the Naval and siege pieces on the ridge, and the howitzers behind it. The Naval guns were carefully protected with sandbags; the 5-inch siege guns were not, and suffered in consequence, one man being killed and five wounded by a single shell. It took our powerful ordnance some time to bring the Boer fire under, and about 10.30 the musketry increased in volume, and lent its quick, fierce rattle to the measured crash of the artillery. For the leading companies of the Queen's were already high on the Cingolo slope and parties of Boers were hurrying across the nek to reinforce their comrades, who fired briskly from the crest of the hill at the slow-moving lines of the infantry.

While this resounding fight was in progress in the centre Dundonald had plunged into the thickets beneath Cingolo and marched steadily to the eastward. The sound of the battle grew fainter as the column of horsemen wound in single file through the tropical vegetation and boulders which impeded their progress until, gradually bending to the northward, they began to ascend the foot-hills of the mighty ridges that towered above them. At last the base of the south-eastern flank was reached. After a vain attempt to reconnoitre, the advance was resumed up a very steep slope and "through a jungle so thick that we had to cut our road."[1]

[1] Winston Churchill, p. 389.

The risk of a surprise was boldly run, and fortune favoured them so far that they had time to gain the summit of the plateau and extend two squadrons of Natal Carbineers and Imperial Light Horse before a party of Boers sighted them and opened fire. Luckily they were not in force, and fell back before the deployed squadrons. The rest of the horsemen had time to deploy, while those in front pushed on along the ridge, killing a few Boers and capturing ten horses on their way. By 12.15 watchers on Hussar Hill saw their heliograph flash on one of the topmost crests and knew that the Cavalry had turned the enemy's left.

Though weak in numbers, the Boers still tried to check the British advance, especially that of the Queen's, who were now likewise approaching the top. For a time the fusillade quickened; then as Dundonald extended his right on to the low plateau north of Cingolo and threatened the nek, and as the two leading companies of the infantry joined the left of the troopers on the sky-line the defenders fled, and Cingolo was in our hands. Hotly followed by Hildyard's men they now renewed the fight on the nek, but were outnumbered and continually driven back. until after about an hour's struggle they retired to Monte Christo, while we set to work to strengthen the positions we had won. The top of Cingolo was carefully occupied and strengthened with schanzes and a field battery was brought part of the way up the mountain. The Cavalry, seeing that some Boers had retreated to the eastern spur of Monte Christo, which could only be attacked frontally, threw out an outpost line in that direction and bivouacked. The front of the army at nightfall ran from Dundonald's outposts, over the Cingolo ridge, and so across the Gomba to Hussar Hill. Barton, who by 4.30 had got to within 800 yards of the Boer trenches on Green Hill, could not safely deliver his attack until Monte Christo was cleared, and Coke, while ready to support his left, had also to guard the guns, whose safety was threatened by a donga running from Green Hill, which was still occupied by the enemy. The left of Coke's line was in touch with Wynne. The first stroke had been admirably carried out at a trifling cost of some fifty men. The next day was to be devoted to the capture of Monte Christo.

The enemy got no rest. On Sunday at dawn (5 a.m.) the bom-

bardment recommenced against the Green Hill and the lofty ridge behind it. The firing gradually increased, until at 8.30 a furious hail of shot was sweeping the mountain from Cingolo, from Dundonald's cavalry, and from the artillery. The infantry advance, which did not mask the artillery, began along the nek at the same hour, the West Yorkshires in front, the East Surrey and Queens in support. Despite the severity of the fire, the Boers held pluckily to their last stronghold and progress, though sure, was slow.[1] At 10.30 the infantry reached the middle of the nek some 800 yards from the Boer riflemen. The right of the attack along the north-eastern slopes seems to have advanced more quickly than that on the southern, probably because the Boers on Hlangwane raked the latter face with distant musketry as well as shells. Mr. Churchill, watching from the cavalry position, tells us that the bayonets of the assailants began to glitter in the trees around the summit at 10.30, and that after 11 a.m. the fight became a rear guard action; but watchers from Hussar Hill state that the crest was not captured before mid-day, and a careful observer[2] makes the hour of occupation 1 p.m. At any rate, despite 100 casualties, the onset was never checked. The enemy were driven from the ridge and began to retire towards their points of crossing. But the Boer shell fire was still accurate and continuous, and the advanced troops on the southern slopes were momentarily driven back into the scrub that fringed their previous line of attack.

The artillery were apparently too distant to quell this fire, and reinforcements were needed to secure the position. At this moment Barton's Brigade received orders to advance. The Welsh Fusiliers dashed forward to support their comrades, and at 2.40 the Irish and Scotch Fusiliers advanced against Green Hill. They met with no resistance. The successful attack along the nek had made the carefully prepared works untenable, and their defenders had fled. From that moment the wide fabric of Boer resistance crumbled helplessly before the march of the British infantry. In great confusion the burghers rushed down to the point of crossing, only a single commando on Hlangwane still sustaining the fight with long-range fire till the

[1] Winston Churchill, p. 393. [2] Atkins, p. 276.

night closed in. The whole of Monte Christo was now in our hands, for Dundonald, when he saw the enemy waver, had galloped forward and seized the subordinate ridge, whence his men poured a heavy fire into their retreating opponents.

Night fell on a totally altered situation. The British line now faced due west. The right rested on the Tugela, the left on Moord Hill. Beyond a deep hollow rose Hlangwane, which the Boers evacuated.[1] That same evening Sir Redvers Buller ordered the Artillery to advance, and the supply waggons and transport reached the Gomba stream.

The enemy made no attempt to rally on the south bank. Next day Barton found Hlangwane tenantless; the Dorsets occupied its western point, and the artillery was brought up on to the plateau during the afternoon. Everywhere in the Boer camps and entrenchments lay evidences of the dismay and surprise of the enemy and the haste of their flight. Ponies, saddles, flour, biltong, entrenching tools, tents "disgustingly foul and stinking," shell of all kinds, large quantities of ammunition (100,000 rounds of Mauser cartridges were collected by the 10th Brigade on Green Hill alone), women's apparel, Dutch Bibles, cooking utensils, and much other miscellaneous property, had been abandoned. The guns had been saved, probably during the night of the 18th. General Buller, now master of the whole of the south bank, slept at Bloys' Farm, under the Monte Christo ridge, from the end of which could be seen the roofs and trees of Ladysmith.

[1] This was due to the disobedience of Commandant Buis, to whom Botha had entrusted the defence of the hill. According to the Boer account he bivouacked on a nek close by and in the morning found himself forestalled by our own troops. See Hillegas, "With the Boer Forces," pp. 97–8.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIGHTING AROUND COLENSO

MORNING OF THE 20TH—INFORMATION AS TO THE ENEMY—BELIEF THAT THE ENEMY WERE FIGHTING A REARGUARD ACTION—JOUBERT'S RETREAT FROM LADYSMITH—BOTHA LEFT TO FIGHT ALONE—HIS NEW POSITION—ALTERNATIVES BEFORE GENERAL BULLER—HIS DECISION TO RETURN TO COLENSO—COKE CROSSES THE TUGELA—ACTION ON THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 21ST—FEBRUARY 22ND—ADVANCE OF WYNNE AND HILDYARD—SEVERE FIGHTING UNDER GROBLER'S KLOOF—POSITIONS IN THE EVENING—NIGHT ATTACK OF THE BOERS—BAYONET CHARGES—HEAVY BRITISH LOSSES—GENERAL BULLER RESOLVES TO ATTACK TERRACE HILL—DISPOSITIONS—HART'S TASK—HIS ADVANCE—DESCRIPTION OF TERRACE HILL—ATTACK AND SLAUGHTER OF THE IRISH BRIGADE—PARTIAL RETIREMENT—NON-ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS ON THE MORNING OF THE 24TH—OPENING OF BOER FIRE FROM BOTH FLANKS—LINE OF RETREAT ENDANGERED—RETIREMENT TO RAILWAY—DEATH OF COLONEL SITWELL—ARRIVAL OF GENERAL HART WITH FRESH TROOPS—LOSSES OF THE BRIGADE—CAUSES OF THE REPULSE—FIGHTING DURING THE 23RD AND 24TH ON THE LEFT OF THE BRITISH LINE—PARTIAL ARMISTICE ON THE 25TH TO COLLECT THE IRISH WOUNDED—NEW PLAN OF SIR REDVERS BULLER TO ROLL UP THE BOER LEFT—GUNS AND BAGGAGE BROUGHT BACK TO SOUTHERN BANK ON 26TH—THE NEW DISPOSITIONS—FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE CAMPAIGN THE WHOLE AVAILABLE STRENGTH EMPLOYED

BY the morning of the 20th the brigades of Hildyard, Norcott, Barton, and Coke, together with most of the artillery, were on the plateau. Wynne and Hart were ready to advance, Dundonald and Burn-Murdoch were within hail. The army was about to strike, but in what direction? Where was the enemy, and what was he about?

Everything seemed to show that he was retreating. It had been known for several days that Lord Roberts was pressing Cronje hard in the Free State, and it therefore appeared probable that the Boer force in Natal would be weakened to reinforce the armies in the west. About Ladysmith the great laagers were being broken up, and long strings of waggons were visible on the Dundee Road. The Colenso trenches appeared but weakly held, for a reconnaissance of the Somerset Light Infantry carried out about midday on the 20th, had entered Colenso without opposition and

drawn only a feeble fire from the kopjes north of the river. The shelling of the British troops and transport columns on Hlangwane during the 19th and 20th was perfectly explicable as an endeavour on the part of a rearguard to gain time until their main body with the baggage had safely commenced the march to Dundee. These various circumstances warranted the belief that the Boers intended making no serious stand on the Tugela, and such, at any rate, was Sir Redvers Buller's own view, for at 4.10 p.m. on February 20th he telegraphed that the enemy had "practically evacuated Colenso," that they seemed to be "in full retreat, apparently only holding a position which they occupy across the Colenso-Ladysmith Railway, where it is close to the angle of the Tugela, with a weak rearguard." He was still of the same opinion after the operations of the 21st, when he reported that the 5th Division had driven back the enemy's rearguard, and that the Naval 12-pounders had silenced all his guns, statements which appear to have been only partially borne out by the facts.

As a matter of fact General Buller's belief that the main body of Joubert's army was retreating from Ladysmith was perfectly correct. The old Boer general, who during the siege of Ladysmith had shown strange irresolution and want of energy, had held a Krijsraad on hearing of General Buller's successes on the south bank, and in the face of the strenuous opposition of Meyer, Erasmus, and Botha had determined to abandon the siege of Ladysmith and retire to the Biggarsberg. With him went the 10,000 men who constituted the investing army, Botha being left to make what shift he could with the 3,000 burghers on whom the defence of the Tugela had mainly depended since the day of Colenso.[1] The forces immediately in Buller's front were therefore in no degree diminished by Joubert's retreat, Botha commanding as many men as at Spion Kop or Vaalkranz. Despite the faintheartedness of his superior and the advantages won by his enemy, that gallant soldier resolved to hold the river-line as long as possible, and by the morning of the 20th had taken up positions of immense strength on Grobler's Kloof and eastward across the railway along

[1] "With the Boer Forces."

the line of the Langewachte Spruit. Practically impregnable on its right and centre, this new line of defence was weaker on its left, opposite to the extremity of which the mass of the British troops now lay.

Such was the state of affairs when on the afternoon or night of the 20th Sir Redvers had to decide on his next move. Whether a rearguard was in front of him or not, he had two main alternatives to choose from. In the first place, he could cross to the south of the new Boer position,

LOOKING UP THE TRENCH: THE MAUSER AMMUNITION WAS LEFT BY THE BOERS ON MONTE CHRISTO

into the Fort Wylie loop, and attack it in front or by way of Grobler's Kloof. He would then directly cover his line of communication with Chieveley and possess two roads by which to advance on Ladysmith, not counting the railway which could have been used by cavalry or infantry. He would, however, be engaging himself in a most difficult country, bounded on the north and west by high hills which it was at present impossible adequately to reconnoitre. In such ground it would not be easy to find a sufficient front for his numerous troops, to whose progress even a weak rearguard might prove a serious impediment. If, on the

contrary, the enemy were stronger than was anticipated, the cramped position between the river and the mountains might entail the failure of the whole operation. Moreover by going back to Colenso all the advantages of the outflanking position on Monte Christo would be lost, the distance from Ladysmith, even allowing for the want of good roads, nearly doubled, and all hope of striking an effective blow against the enemy's flank and rear have to be abandoned.

Just as every tactical and strategical disadvantage necessarily followed a movement into the Fort Wylie hills, so an advance across the Tugela opposite or east of Monte Christo offered almost every condition of rapid and decisive success. Hart's Brigade could have been left to cover the communications at Colenso just as Barton's had done during the operations on the Upper Tugela, while the regular cavalry with the force at Springfield guarded the western flank. The rest of the infantry, Dundonald's horsemen, and the field artillery, could have crossed between the Boer bridge and the river junction, wherever the course of the stream and the disposition of the enemy favoured bridge-building. The passage could have been covered by the heavy guns which would have remained on the heights until the troops were firmly established on the northern bank. This operation having been carried out with secrecy and despatch, General Buller would have found himself within a march of Isimbulwana, the main Boer position on the south-east of Ladysmith, and within a shorter distance of Botha's left near Pieter's Station. If the latter had retreated in time there would still have been a chance of falling on his line of march north-west of the town near Modder Spruit; if he had stood fast he could have been cut off and his line rolled up. The country over which the British would have had to manœuvre was certainly difficult, but was not commanded by higher hills, nor so broken as the chaos of kopjes round Colenso. Finally, the line of supplies from Railhead to Bloy's Farm was only about half as long as that from Frere to Potgieter's. It is not easy to understand why the British commander, in face of the small body of the enemy he believed to be still in his front, should not at once have passed the river and struck boldly at the Boer line of retreat. Weighty reasons there may have been. At present it is as impossible to guess

at them as to deny that the decision to operate from Colenso turned out most unfortunately.[1]

On the morning of February 21st, Hart's troops, headed by the Dublins, having passed near Colenso on the preceding day, Coke's Brigade received orders to cross, and about 2 p.m. his leading battalion, the Somersets, began to defile over a pontoon bridge thrown nearly a mile and a half almost due north of Fort Wylie. The 10th Brigade was to push westwards and cover the advance of the artillery, which was to shell the Boers along the line of Onderbrook Spruit.

As soon as the troops began to advance the Boer gunners who had been firing sighting shots at the bridge during the morning, opened a heavy fire of shell. But the ground was soft from recent rain, and the heavier projectiles descending from the hills plunged harmlessly into the mud. A bridge is a shallow mark, and no casualty occurred as Coke's three battalions hurried across. The Somersets advanced for the best part of a mile, and had reached the western edge of the group of kopjes when they were brought to a halt by shell fire from the north and rifle fire from the low ground on their left. The main body of the battalion was halted, two companies supported by half a battalion of Dorsets were sent to the northward, and soon came under a heavy fire from Onderbrook Spruit and the neighbouring ridges. At 4 p.m. two field batteries opened fire from a kopje near the bridge, but failed to silence the Boer guns which were far off and hard to locate. Throughout the afternoon the fight continued, the Somersets, in spite of gallant efforts, being unable to gain any ground. The opposing rifle fire was very hot, and the shells raked and searched the hollows between the knolls, making the position of the reserves almost as precarious as

[1] Two reasons for General Buller's decision have been alleged. It has been stated that, believing that no serious resistance would be offered, he hoped by moving along the roads from Colenso to save his troops fatigue.

Another explanation is that he expected the Boers to fight on Isimbulwana. In either case, however, the true strategic direction was against the Dundee road and railway. If the Boers did not intend to fight again, a march on Elandslaagte offered the best, in fact, the only chance of intercepting their retreat: if they made another stand near Ladysmith the most effective method of defeating them was to operate on their flank and rear. Indeed, we should rather have expected over-boldness than over-deliberation from a general who believed the enemy to be retreating.

THE FINAL CROSSING OF THE TUGELA

that of the firing line. At 5 p.m. part of the Somersets advancing against a hill under Grobler's Kloof, came under a murderous fire from concealed trenches, losing altogether three officers killed, one wounded, and over eighty rank and file. This bloody episode ended the action, and at nightfall General Coke, whose brigade-major, Captain Phillips, had been hit in the shoulder, withdrew the exposed battalion, and by means of signal fires brought his troops nearer Colenso, as the positions they had occupied were commanded by the fire from Grobler's Kloof

A SKETCH IN THE BOER TRENCHES AT FORT WYLIE

and the spurs beneath it. The fight which cost the 10th Brigade about 100 men had shown that the enemy were in considerable force to the north and west, and that, far from being a mere screen, they were strongly posted in prepared positions and ready to make a stubborn resistance.

Sniping went on at intervals throughout the night, but no serious fighting took place till after midday on the 22nd, for the Boers at present maintained their customary invisible defensive, and the British troops passed the morning in crossing the river. Barton's Brigade

A 4·7 INCH NAVAL GUN IN ACTION AGAINST GROBLER'S KLOOF

and part of Hart's still remained on the right bank, the rest filed into the Fort Wylie loop. The artillery took up positions along the Hlangwane slopes and on the low kopjes on the left bank, but their fire could not effectually crush the Boer guns, which scattered their shells along the front of the British position and around the pontoon.

At length at 1.30 Wynne's half-brigade,[1] the Lancaster and South Lancashire Regiments, on a front of about half a mile,[2] advanced to the attack in a northerly direction, their right resting on the railway. The 3rd King's Royal Rifles, the Composite Rifle battalion,[3] and Hildyard's brigade followed in support.

The leading companies of the Lancashire men extended and pushed on over the rolling kopjes that lie along the course of the Onderbrook Spruit.[4] They had not got far when the Boers opened a very rapid fire from Grobler's Kloof and the ground to the northward. Belts of scrub, stone schanzes, and deeply sunk trenches effectually hid their

[1] The other two battalions were apparently still at Springfield.

[2] *Times* account. [3] Formed of Reservists.

[4] We are unable to speak with certainty as to the positions occupied by the foremost line on the night of February 22nd. The kopjes up to Onderbrook Spruit were clearly in our hands, and form a well-marked line from east of west overlooking a rather lower stretch of ground, 1,200 yards in width, spreading northwards to Langewachte Spruit. Beyond this again one mile to the north-east rises Terrace Hill attacked on the 23rd by the Irish Brigade. Measured in a straight line from Onderbrook Spruit bridge this height is 3,000 yards off, *i.e.*, scarcely within rifle range. The question is, was the ground *between* the two Spruits occupied on the evening of the 22nd or on the morning of the 23rd?

In Mr. Atkins' map ("Relief of Ladysmith," p. 293) our progress on the 22nd is limited to the kopjes south of Onderbrook Spruit, nor is there any mention of crossing the stream in the various accounts. It is further clear that the ground between the Spruits is much more exposed in point of distance, configuration, and positions to fire from Grobler's Kloof, Terrace Hill, and the kopjes above Langewachte Spruit, than the low hillocks south of Onderbrook Spruit. On the other hand, we have the testimony of an officer (*United Service Magazine* for June, 1900), whose company had relieved a company of the Lancashires on the night of the 22nd, that at dawn on the 23rd he found himself within 2,000 yards of Hart's Hill (called by him Green Hill), enfiladed from the left by a Boer sangar 800 yards away and facing a donga about 1,000 yards off full of snipers. Measurements appear to show that this position was actually on the flat ridge between the watercourses. In the following pages we have assumed this to be the case. The British line, then, by the evening of the 22nd must have run in a curve from Colenso village across Onderbrook Spruit on to the ridge south of the Langewachte hollow.

riflemen, and the slight haze of the smokeless powder offered no mark. Their bullets, for the most part unaimed, fell on every kopje and searched every hollow so that the supports and reserves were often in more danger than the companies in the firing line. The Boer shells also did much damage, especially among the animals in rear of the fighting troops. As the leading battalions pressed forward they exposed their left flank more and more to the enemy on Grobler's Kloof who crept down to within closer range and compelled them to form a new front. The advance of the Lancashires being checked on the long kopje on the northern bank of the Onderbrook Spruit, the

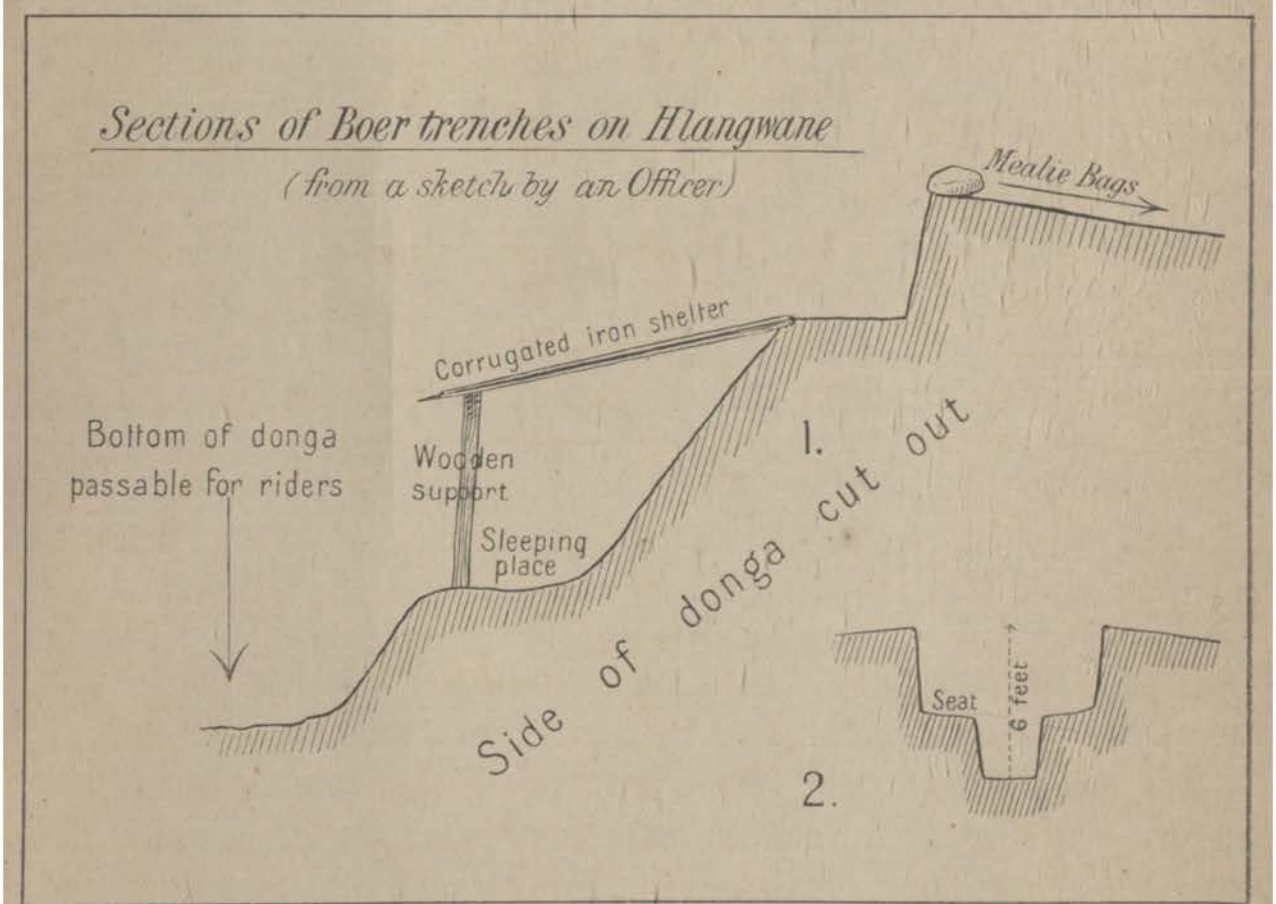
A PONTOON OVER THE TUGELA

3rd Rifles, followed by the Composite Battalion, went in to cover the exposed flank. The fighting here was very fierce and close, some of the enemy, as the British approached, holding on to the last. One was shot within a few yards of his post and another was bayoneted. Those who escaped retreated northward towards the scrub and kopjes high up the Langewachte stream.

By nightfall, in spite of heavy losses, including General Wynne, who was wounded early in the day, the ground up to within 1,000 yards of that stream had been won, the Lancashire battalions facing northwards, the Rifles curving round to the left so that their front was

nearly parallel to the river, while to the left again on the kopjes near Colenso Coke's Brigade with some of Thorneycroft's Horse prolonged the line to the south. Further in rear was Hart's Brigade, and the as yet unengaged battalions of Hildyard and Norcott.

There was to be no rest for the troops that evening. At 7 p.m. the East Surreys went forward to cover the retirement of three companies of the 60th who were in advance of the line on an isolated



kopje and in some danger of being cut off. Under a furious close-range fire and with heavy loss to the relieving battalion the Riflemen fell back, and the two regiments with part of the Composite Battalion prepared to hold their ground for the night, busying them with the building of schanzes. The hostile lines were in some places barely 200 yards apart, and the situation was too critical for sleep. Both sides feared a sudden attack, the Boers probably more than ourselves, and throughout the night firing went on, swelling at intervals into

a tremendous roar. The least movement on either side brought on a wild fire-fight; hundreds of yards of hill crest and schanze blazed with musketry, and a sheet of lead whistled through the darkness far into the rear of the crouching riflemen, startling commanders and their staffs and trebling the difficulty of relieving the advanced companies at the proper time. So serious did the position of the East Surreys become that at dawn Colonel Harris resolved to drive off the infesting Boers and ordered a bayonet charge. The enemy gave way before the cold steel, but so thickly flew the Mauser bullets, that the gallant Colonel was hit in ten places before he could be carried to cover. The battalion was relieved at midday, having lost 140 men during the fourteen hours it had been under fire.

So hot indeed was the fighting on other parts of the line as well that it seems not improbable that the Boers, as at Vaalkranz, tried deliberately to bring on a panic by a sudden and furious night attack. The Rifle battalions were so closely engaged that in the morning sixteen men showed blood on their bayonets. The sturdy demeanour of our infantry prevented the enemy from gaining their object, but in justice we must admit the dash and determination shown by their opponents. Both sides lost heavily, the British about 300 men and officers, the Boers, amongst other dead, a grandson of President Kruger. But though the enemy could not drive us back the open ground to the north made a further frontal attack on our part hopeless, and it behoved General Buller to find other means of compelling the enemy to retreat. The problem was to find the point on which the Boer left, their only assailable flank, rested, and on the morning of the 23rd the British commander believing it to terminate on Terrace Hill resolved to send a force round under cover of the river bank to attack that position and so turn Botha's flank. Hart received orders to march with the Inniskillings, Connaughts and Dublins of his own brigade, the Imperial Light Infantry, the Durham Light Infantry, and the 2nd battalion of the Rifle Brigade; the mass of the Artillery were concentrated towards the northern spur of Hlangwane, and Dundonald's horsemen were sent to maintain touch between Coke and Lyttelton so as to be at hand to reinforce those generals should the Boers make

a counter-attack on the British left. The infantry engaged on the 22nd and during the preceding night, stood fast on the low kopjes on both sides of Onderbrook Spruit, thus partially covering the flank of Hart's movement till he should launch his men upon Terrace Hill. His six battalions numbered about 4,000 men.

The task set the Irish Brigade was perilous enough. It had to move in a long column along the line of the railway, sheltered as much as possible by the river bank but exposed to fire from the north-east. The bridges across the Spruits were carefully ranged by the Boers, that over the Langewachte watercourse being exposed from several directions at the range of about one mile. This passed the troops had to bend to the eastward covered only partially by the railway and the slopes along which it ran, and take ground due south of Terrace Hill in the space enclosed by the line and the river. The embankment was about 600 yards from the summit and offered almost the last available cover. The hill curves were seamed with schanzes and entrenchments, the southern face being formed of a comparatively narrow ridge 300 or 400 yards wide, up which the centre of the attack would have to move. Nor was this all. From the kloofs and knolls to westward a tremendous enfilading fire could be thrown upon the ridge, while to the north-eastward rose Railway Hill also strongly held by the Boers and within 1,000 yards of the top of Terrace Hill.

Briefly then General Hart had to make a march across the enemy's front exposed at several points to hostile fire. He was then to wheel to the left, form line of attack within about 1,200 yards of the Boer entrenchments, and assault frontally the centre of a position about one and a half miles long, from the wings of which it was easy to pour a devastating fire into his flanks. It does not appear to have been known to the British General that the Boer left extended to Railway Hill, for he hoped that by seizing Terrace Hill the enemy's position would have been effectually turned.[1]

General Hart started at 12.30 p.m. with his own brigade; the Rifle battalions moved up to occupy the position he had vacated. The thin column drew out along the railway and plodded steadily ahead despite

[1] Winston Churchill.

the fire of the Boer artillery. At certain points, especially at the Langewachte crossing, the fusillade increased in volume and deadliness; shells dropped fast along the banks, bullets splashed on the red ironwork, and the men had to run for their lives across the exposed space. More than sixty were so hit before the perilous defile was cleared and the embankment on the further side reached. The general movement was

From a photograph by] *[Elliott and Fry.*

GENERAL FITZROY HART

necessarily slow, and by the time General Hart was ready to attack it was 4 p.m. He had then the Inniskillings (six companies), the Connaughts, and the Dublins in hand. The Rifle battalions and the Imperial Light Infantry took no part in the action until next day.

The Boers were shooting fast as the Inniskillings wheeled northward and began to advance by rushes towards the railway, the boulders and ledges of rock providing ample shelter as they moved forward.

Into the enemy, whose slouch hats now showed thickly along the trenches, the British artillery were pouring a furious rain of lyddite and shrapnel, but the Boers stood to it stubbornly and would not slacken their fire. The extent of their position was now revealed, for from Railway Hill and from the dongas west of Terrace Hill came a stinging enfilade. General Hart made shift to cover his right, directing four companies of the Dublins to a small donga to the east of Terrace Hill, but neither here nor to the left, whither some troops[1] also appear to have been detached, was the movement pressed, and the fire of the defenders was not checked. It was left to the Inniskillings under Colonel Thackeray and four companies of the Connaughts, perhaps 800 bayonets in all, to carry the trenches of Terrace Hill. Below them as a reserve were the remaining half battalion of the Dublins.

The front of the hill ran into a sharp southern angle, and descended to the railway line 400 yards distant in a steep and broken slope, which afforded very fair cover. The terraced crest which overlooked this was defended by a long trench, and behind lay the true summit 200 yards farther to the northward, also covered with trench and schanze.

The railway was reached shortly after five o'clock, and the men took shelter under its embankment. But not for long. At the order of General Hart the leading companies sprang to their feet and dashed up the hillside with a cheer. The ruggedness of the ground shielded them from the Boer fire, and without attempting to fire a shot they cleared the first trench, its defenders flying fast before the glittering bayonets, so that when the Inniskillings reached it, it was practically empty, and the main body of the enemy had disappeared. Without pausing the great wave of the attack, now contracted by the narrowness of the ridge, swept over the sky-line to meet a sheet of lead, before which nothing could live. Men and officers sank in rows under the merciless storm which, poured in at point blank range, destroyed everything above the ground line. It was in vain that fresh companies dashed up and strove to gain ground. As each successive rush topped the crest a hail of bullets beat it to the ground until nothing remained

[1] Probably Connaughts.

alive on the fatal slope but the wounded groaning in their agony. So resolute were the enemy, that some of them actually left their summit entrenchments and ran to meet the charge, firing as they went.[1] In a few seconds the impetus of the assault was broken, in a few minutes the Inniskillings had ceased to exist as a battalion. Three out of every five of their officers, including the colonel, were down, and of the rank and file seven out of every ten. Nor did the firing cease when the survivors had retired to the first trench. The movements of the injured striving to crawl back evoked a fresh outburst of shot, for, in the fading light and at so short a distance, the enemy feared lest the Irish should make good a bayonet charge, and dared not allow them a chance of creeping nearer. As darkness fell Colonel Sitwell made a final effort with some of the Connaughts and Dublins, and again the massacre was repeated. Persistence was hopeless, yet the broken remnant showed no sign of panic, holding the ground they had won, and striving to protect themselves by means of schanzes. The rising moon looked down upon a horrible scene of carnage, for the front was very short and the zone of destruction very narrow, bounded by a leaden barrier, which nothing could pass and live. In that acre of death, without water or help, exposed to a burning sun and stray bullets, the wounded lay till Sunday morning, a space of thirty-six hours. Many died victims to pain and exhaustion.

Firing did not cease with nightfall. The bullets of the snipers constantly swept the ridge, causing fresh losses. Late in the evening an officer crept down to the supports under the slope of the hill and asked Colonel Brooke for instructions. He was ordered to bring back all whom he could collect, and slowly, with as little noise as possible, the weary men crawled back and with their comrades began to build schanzes against the enfilading fire which they knew would begin at dawn. The brigadier had gone, leaving orders that the hill was to be held and that reinforcements would be brought by morning.

With the light came the Boers, but no reinforcements. From the wooded kloof on the left and down the railway on the right the enemy pressed forward in considerable force, and bullets began to fall

[1] Winston Churchill, p. 419.

thickly amongst the flimsy schanzes. The position soon became serious. Two companies of the Connaughts moved out to cover the right, and the Imperial Light Infantry was ordered to guard the left, the only available line of retreat, but for some reason this was not done,[1] and the dangerous gap remained unclosed. Towards it the Boers advanced, and so effectively did they rake the front line of the Irish Brigade that Brooke withdrew at 8 a.m. to the railway line, where lay the four reserve companies of the Dublins. The retirement was excellently carried out under heavy loss, including that of Colonel Sitwell, who was the last man to retire, and whose coolness and gallantry greatly steadied the weary men. Here for three hours more that splendid infantry, suffering from hunger and exhaustion and ill-supplied with ammunition, held out without flinching. At last at 11 a.m. General Hart arrived with two battalions (2nd Rifle Brigade and Durham Light Infantry), relieved the pressure on the left, and rendered the position secure. As he appeared the sorely tried Irish raised a shout of welcome and relief. And well they might. For nearly twenty-four hours they had been marching or fighting, and the attacking column, in all about 1,200 men strong, had lost two colonels, three majors, twenty other officers, and over 600[2] men. Of the Inniskillings only five officers remained; no less than 414 of the rank and file had been killed and wounded. Out of over 500 bayonets, only forty men with one officer answered the first roll-call.[3] The Dublins lost about one hundred men, the Connaughts 150. So ended one of the bloodiest dramas of the war, unrivalled as a display of heroism, and a worthy though tragic consummation of the long series of gallant deeds wrought by Irish soldiers on the banks of the Tugela.

The causes of the dreadful loss are patent. The attacking column was hurled upon the centre of a very strong position; its flanks were unsupported, and the enemy's wings were consequently able to concentrate their whole fire upon the single battalion that delivered the main attack. Furthermore the Inniskillings attacked on

[1] See letter of officer in *To-Day* (March 29, 1900).
[2] Winston Churchill, p. 420. [3] *Daily Telegraph.*

THE TRANSPORT OF THE WOUNDED FROM THE FIELD OF BATTLE

too narrow a front.[1] The late arrival of General Hart's reinforcements greatly augmented their losses; indeed, in the opinion of the officer whose forcible letters appeared in *To-day*, disaster was only averted by the superb steadiness of the soldiers. The whole scheme of the attack appears to have been based on the false assumption that the enemy's left rested on Terrace Hill, whereas in reality it stretched at least as far as the line between Railway and Pieter's Hills. Hence the assault fell on the Boer front instead of the flank. Such errors are characteristic of modern warfare, with its huge battlefields and long-range arms. A similar miscalculation cost the Prussian Guard 8,000 men in front of St. Privat. Equally striking in both instances was the failure of a most powerful artillery to crush the fire of resolute men.

On the left of the British line the 23rd and 24th passed in constant fighting, in some cases at close quarters, in others in long-range sniping. After and during the attack of Hart's Brigade a Boer counter attack was expected on Colenso, and preparations were made to receive it. The 73rd Battery was actually loaded with case shot, so near were the Boers and so bold had been their demeanour on the preceding days. But the attack was never made. Desultory, sometimes heavy firing went on—neither side gaining ground, but the losses, on our side at least, were continuous. It is at present impossible to give a detailed account of the long-continued action below Grobler's Kloof. Boers and British lay behind their several schanzes and fired vigorously when they could find a mark, in which circumstances were certainly more favourable to the enemy. Spread over a front of five or six miles for the most part on ground which commanded our movements, Botha's line ran in a long curve around our position. His artillery, which ours was not able to silence, searched every hollow and ridge; his musketry, which forbade advance, greatly harassed our infantry and made it difficult, if not impossible, for General Buller to utilise his numbers. Aided by and perfectly acquainted with the ground, he could reinforce any point at

[1] Apparently a front of four companies. The conformation of the ground further narrowed this space, so that where the slaughter took place there was only room for two companies extended to the proper intervals.

NEARING LADYSMITH, VIEW FROM LONGWOOD FARM

will, while he filled the rest of his long positions with detachments. So powerful is the defensive in modern war, that the Boer Commandant with 3,000 mounted infantry and six guns was able completely to check nearly twenty battalions of regular infantry, 1,500 horsemen and over sixty guns. This was, of course, in a large degree due to local conditions, but the fact is too significant to be passed over.

Until the morning of the 25th the situation remained the same. After Hart's Brigade had been relieved by the reinforcements his weakened battalions withdrew towards the gorge of the Tugela, there to recruit their energies and rally their shattered companies. Their unfortunate comrades on Terrace Hill remained lying in their blood. Some were given water by the enemy who came out under the Red Cross flag to collect their own wounded, but by some mistake we did not send out a Red Cross party to meet them, and when individual Boers began to loot the dead bodies our men in the schanzes became uncontrollable and opened fire.[1] This appears to have put an end to intercourse for the day, for it was not till the following morning that General Buller asked for an armistice. A regular armistice the Boers refused to grant, but it was arranged that we should be allowed to remove the wounded and bury the dead, on condition that we did not fire on the enemy's schanzes during the day. The state of the living was pitiable; more dreadful still was the appearance of the slain, blackened under a blazing sun, and in some cases torn with expansive bullets. Over sixty bodies were buried on Terrace Hill.[2]

Sir Redvers Buller had now successively probed the right, centre, and left of the Boer position. He had found the first two impregnable, and the third to extend further than he had supposed. He had lost nearly 1,500 men, and despite his successes on the south bank final victory seemed as far off as ever. The only remaining alternative was

[1] Winston Churchill.

[2] It is interesting to note how small was the proportion of killed as compared with that on Spion Kop. The total of casualties in the last instance was only slightly larger, yet there were 243 bodies buried as compared with about a fourth of that number on Terrace Hill. The difference must have been due to the nature of the fire; shell wounds are far more fatal than the clean wound of a small bore rifle.

to make a wider sweep to the eastward, and turning the enemy's left roll his line up and drive him back upon Ladysmith. The easiest and most direct way was to return to Hlangwane, and this the British General resolved to do.

A new point of passage of the river was found by Colonel Sandbach below the falls close to the still intact Boer bridge; on the 25th the approach to it was reported practicable, and on the next day the heavy guns were brought back to the south bank and placed in three groups; four Naval 12-pounders on the northern spur of Hlangwane, four on Monte Christo, and two 4·7-in. and two 5-in. between the lighter batteries on the lower plateau. The same day the baggage was withdrawn, and during the night a redistribution of the infantry commands took place.

Sir Redvers Buller's new dispositions were ably planned. He left Coke's three battalions to cover Colenso. The West Surreys, Devons, King's Royal Rifles, a half battalion of the Scottish Rifles, the Royal Fusiliers, and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under the command of General Lyttelton, were to contain the enemy's right and centre, and prepare the grand attack by a steady long-range musketry.

The assault was to be begun by the Scots, Irish, and Dublin Fusiliers under General Barton, who, crossing at the new bridge, were to move one and a half miles down the Tugela and capture Pieter's Hill, or Three Knoll Hill, so called by the British gunners from three successive kopjes which marked the extreme left of the Boer line. When these and the long ridge running south-west towards Railway Hill had been seized, Colonel Kitchener's Brigade[1] was to attack Railway Hill and the neck between it and Terrace Hill. Then at the proper moment Colonel Norcott[2] was to rush Terrace Hill from the south and west. Could these wide and complicated movements be carried out, the whole of the Boer left would be turned and beaten, the way to Bulwana Mountain opened, and the rest of Botha's men forced to

[1] The South Lancashire, Royal Lancaster, York and Lancaster and the West Yorkshire Regiments.

[2] The Durham Light Infantry, 2nd Rifle Brigade, East Surrey, and the other half battalion of the Scottish Rifles.

retreat or be cut off from the Ladysmith road. The attack was to be by echelons from the right, each brigade successively seizing that part of the enemy's position in its immediate front. It would thus turn the hill next on its left and so prepare the way for its comrades.

In support of the grand advance the Border Regiment (late of Hart's Brigade) and the Composite Rifle Battalion were to line the southern bank below the heavy batteries and pour a ceaseless volume of fire upon the Boer hills. Dundonald's cavalry under Monte Christo was to search with bullets the wooded valleys on the flank of Barton's advance. The field batteries were to take post on Hlangwane, within easy reach of Terrace and Railway Hills.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the Tugela Campaign, the whole of General Buller's available force was to be hurled on the enemy's position. Ten and a half battalions were to form the line of attack, five or six more and the mounted infantry to support it with rifle-fire, sixty guns at ranges of 2,000 to 3,000 yards to carry terror and destruction throughout the Boer defences. Such were the imposing masses on whose courage, unshaken by twelve days' bitter fighting, their worn and anxious commander based his hopes of a successful issue.[1]

[1] The operations (Feb. 21–24) on the north bank of the Tugela form an eloquent comment on General Buller's plan for the first battle of Colenso. Had he effected a lodgment on the kopjes he actually occupied after the capture of Hlangwane, he would have met with the same impenetrable resistance in front, and would at the same time have been exposed to a flanking fire from the Boers on Hlangwane itself. Moreover, he would not have been able, as was possible to him after he had seized that mountain, to cross the river again and fall on the Boer left. Indeed, while it remained in Boer hands, no progress towards Ladysmith was possible, and it seems clear that had General Buller forced the river on December 15th, no further course would have been left open to him but a costly frontal assault on the Pieter's position to be followed by a costly retreat.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH

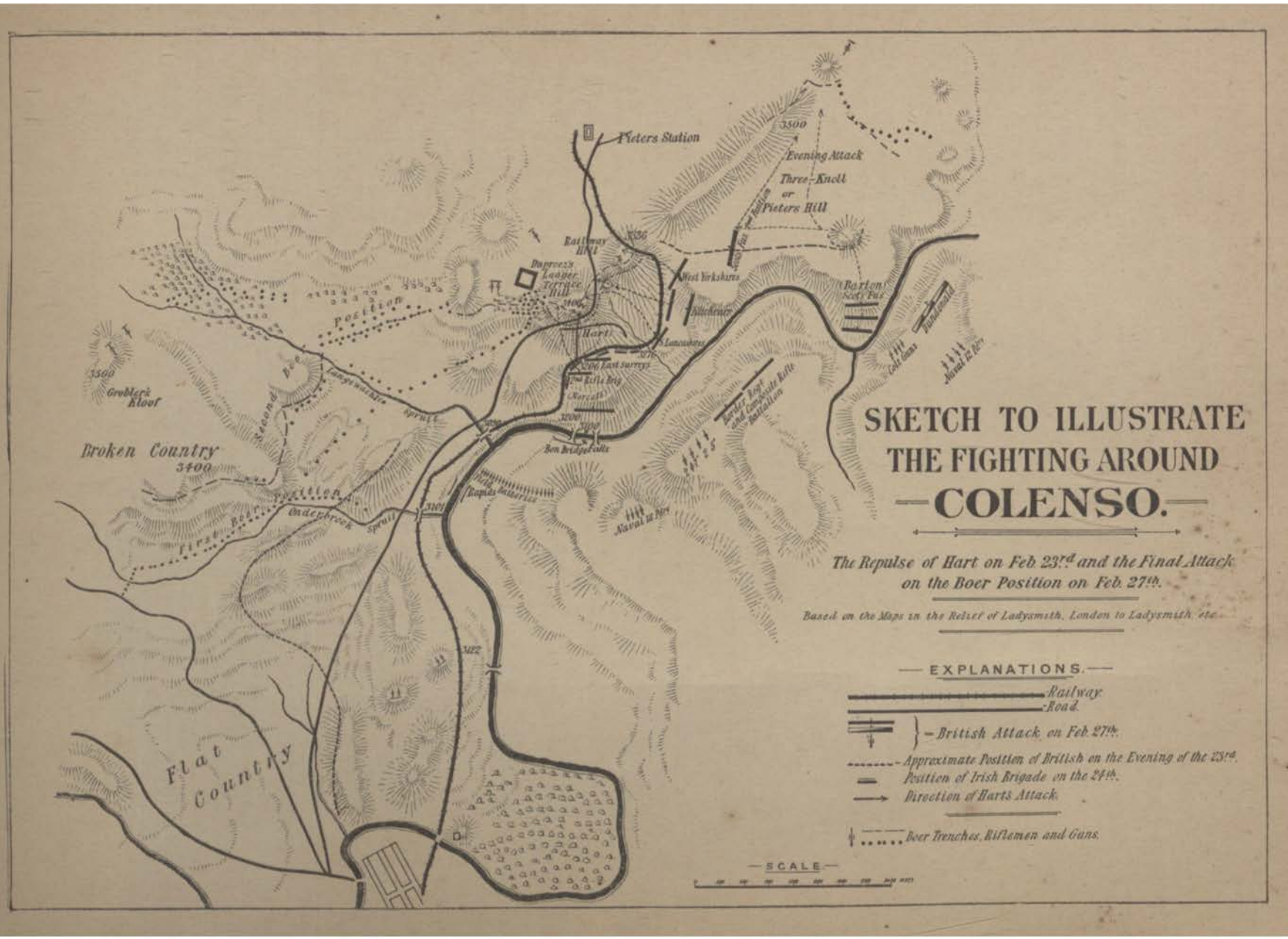
MORNING OF THE 27TH—THE NEWS OF PAARDEBERG—THE ARTILLERY OPENS FIRE—BARTON'S SUCCESSFUL ATTACK—KITCHENER'S BRIGADE PREPARES TO FOLLOW SUIT—GREAT FIRE-FIGHT IN THE CENTRE—DESPERATE RESISTANCE OF THE BOERS—WEST YORKSHIRES GAIN GROUND EAST OF RAILWAY HILL—SUDDEN CHARGE OF THE LANCASHIRES AGAINST THE NEK SUCCESSFUL—NORCOTT JOINS IN—THE BOER POSITIONS BRILLIANTLY CARRIED—EVENING OF THE VICTORY—REPULSE OF BARTON ON THE EXTREME RIGHT—GENERAL RETREAT OF THE ENEMY—FEBRUARY 28TH—DUNDONALD'S ENTRY INTO LADYSMITH—MARCH 1ST—SHOULD THE CAVALRY HAVE PURSUED THE BOER REARGUARD?—FINE EFFORT OF THE GARRISON—DISAPPEARANCE OF BOERS—THEIR LOSSES—SUPPLIES BROUGHT INTO LADYSMITH—END OF THE HISTORY OF THE RELIEF COLUMN

THE night of the 26th and the early hours of the following morning were occupied in the removal and transport of the pontoons to the new point of passage, and it was nearly midday before everything was ready. Just as Barton's and Kitchener's infantry were about to cross, a staff-officer galloped up with the news of Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg, and with loud cheers the columns hurried down to the bank. The word was passed round that it was Majuba Day; fiercely and eagerly the soldiers pressed across the river and wheeled to the right under cover of Hart's and Norcott's men. Barton marched a mile and a half down-stream, Kitchener took up a position in the gorge between Pieter's plateau and the railway. There his men had to wait till the Fusilier battalions on their right had struck the first blow and turned the Boer left. Further to the west Norcott occupied the slopes between the railway and river on which Hart had formed his brigade for attack. The Irish battalions, excepting the Dublins, took no part in the assault. Apparently they remained near the bank throughout the day. Meanwhile the artillery, which had been in action throughout the morning, quickened its fire. At the short range its accuracy was great and its effect tremendous. The Boer guns

in Grobler's Kloof ceased to reply, silenced at last by the Naval 12-pounders on Hlangwane. At the same moment all their guns stopped firing, and from then onward took little part in the battle. Our heavy batteries now turned their aim on Pieter's Hill, while the Colt guns with Dundonald on the northern spur of Monte Christo kept up a heavy fire on the dongas to the eastward, and

THE 1ST LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS WAITING THE ORDER TO ADVANCE

the South African Light Horse poured a flood of musketry upon every slope which might be tenanted by the enemy. At one o'clock Barton had got his battalions into order of attack. The Scots Fusiliers led the onset up the steep slopes from the river, and with little loss or opposition crowned the first hill, its defenders, with the haphazardness of irregulars, being at that moment absent from the position they had been ordered to hold. They returned too late to



SKETCH TO ILLUSTRATE THE FIGHTING AROUND —COLENSO.—

The Repulse of Hart on Feb 23rd and the Final Attack on the Boer Position on Feb 27th.

Based on the Maps in the Relief of Ladysmith, London to Ladysmith etc.

— EXPLANATIONS. —

- Railway.
- Road.
- British Attack on Feb 27th.
- Approximate Position of British on the Evening of the 23rd.
- Position of Irish Brigade on the 24th.
- Direction of Harts Attack.
- Boer Trenches, Riflemen and Guns.

— SCALE —

prevent Barton from establishing his right to the northward of the hill he had captured, and in consonance with the intentions of his commander wheeling his leading battalion to the left to prepare Kitchener's advance against Railway Hill. The first step had been fortunate, but more desperate work was now at hand.

The 11th Brigade had spread out along the broken slopes south of Railway Hill, the West Yorkshires facing the deep gorge between that height and Pieter's Hill, the South Lancashires resting their left on the donga which descends between Railway Hill and Terrace Hill, and which the right of Hart's Brigade had occupied during the charge of the Inniskillings. They were extended in order of attack, sprinkled thickly among the boulders and ledges which as far as the railway afforded excellent cover. Their advance to the line was performed in rushes and with hardly any loss in spite of the hot Mauser fire with which the enemy were plying them. There, however, their progress was stayed. From both hills, and from a small kopje on the nek between, a storm of bullets swept the bare slope, 500 yards wide in their front, and threatened to shatter the strength of any assault. But no premature attempt was made, and Barton had time to gain the ground east of Railway Hill so as to enfilade the Boer trenches, while the terrible line of guns, whose fire was now converging from a front of three miles, was able to work its fullest effect.

Not often, even in these days of mighty masses of artillery, has a limited space of ground been subjected to such a devastating tempest as now burst upon the hill-tops. Seven field batteries, each probably firing at the rate of three or four shells per minute, and over twenty other pieces, heavy and light, were throwing upon the clear-drawn lines of trenches a crossing fire of shrapnel and lyddite, before which it seemed impossible to endure. The explosions of the Naval shells bursting upon impact shook the slopes on which Hildyard's battalions were lying, heaved masses of earth and rock into the air, and beat in the Boer ramparts; and above the darker belt of smoke and dust flashed the shrapnel, raking everything above ground and searching with its flat ranging bullets the furthest crests of the kopjes. Most of the defenders, indeed, were unhurt by this terrific cannonade, for they were protected

by the trenches, over which no one as yet showed themselves. But of the value of that shell-storm there can be no question. It prevented serious loss amongst the infantry until the moment of the actual charge, and it certainly disconcerted their musketry when the assailants advanced to storm the position. And its effect was not merely preventive. The fainter-hearted Boers were already in flight to the kloof to the westward, coming as they retreated under the flanking fire of the infantry behind Langewachte Spruit. No small part in the fire preparation was played by these battalions and by the Borderers and Riflemen on the southern bank, who, firing from medium artillery range, bespattered the brown hillsides with bullets and greatly helped to minimise the effect of the long-range musketry with which the Boers ever strove to shake the order of distant troops. This "unaimed, not indirected"[1] rifle fire will undoubtedly be an important element in future offensive warfare, especially when artillery is not present.

It was now long past three o'clock, and the moment that was to decide the issue of this momentous passage of arms was fast approaching. Sternly resolute — for no child's play awaited them — Kitchener's Brigade began to push forward again, the West Yorkshires along the railway into the steep and sheltering gorge between Railway and Pieter's Hills, the Lancashire Battalions more to the westward, the right towards the front of Railway Hill itself, the South Lancashires and part of the Lancaster Regiment in the direction of the entrenched kopje on the nek. The ground favoured the right wing more than the left; and for a time the advance on the latter flank came to a standstill, for the brave Dutchmen, reckless of the dreadful shell fire, stood up in their trenches and swept the bare slopes with a hail of shot, emptying their magazines as fast as they could be handed up by the men behind. The fire-fight had now reached its greatest intensity. Every gun and rifle that the British could bring to bear was now pouring its missiles upon the defenders, who, with frantic energy and unsparing courage, were concentrating their fire upon the attacking infantry. Through the whirling smoke of the shells the slouch hats could be seen bobbing up and down, some bending for ammunition,

[1] Winston Churchill.

some ducking involuntarily in front of an explosion, some smitten down, others rising in their places. Never had the burghers been so sorely pressed, but their better men never flinched, and so sustained was their fire that the fate of Ladysmith trembled in the balance. Shells and bullets might do their worst, but victory still rested, and in every serious action will rest, on the bayonets of the infantry. The question that exercised the anxious watchers on the southern bank was, Could that infantry manage to advance?

On the right, indeed, the West Yorkshires were steadily creeping forward, and under cover of the slopes on their left had penetrated into the railway gorge, where the rock-hewn embankment enabled them to gain the flank of the Boer trenches on Railway Hill. But on the left the South Lancashires were still "pinned to the ground" by the fire, and the two trenches and the small kopje on the nek were swarming with the enemy. Very slow was the progress—100 yards in half an hour, as one spectator phrased it. Twice the Boers on the kopje recoiled and fled before the naval shells, and twice a tall man in a brown jersey followed them and brought them back. The fury of the fight showed no sign of abating when the resolute action of a small body of men completely reversed the situation.

Suddenly from the right front of the Lancashire Battalions[1] a score of soldiers who had got far forward leapt up with fixed bayonets and rushed upon the left flank of the kopje. In a moment the same impulse ran, like the spark down a train of gunpowder, along the whole fighting-line of the South Lancashires. Bounding to their feet, they too rushed on at full speed. The fierce shout and the oncoming flood of men broke the will of the defenders. They turned and fled. The last man on the kopje was their indomitable leader. As he sprang on to the rampart to empty his rifle into the

[1] To what battalion these men belonged is not stated, nor, until the detailed reports are accessible, can we determine the exact part played by each regiment. It is doubtful whether Colonel Kitchener employed a force of more than three battalions; the central one was probably divided to support with its left the South Lancashires and with its right the West Yorkshires. This central battalion appears to have been the Royal Lancasters.

THE TAKING OF PIETER'S HILL BY KITCHENER'S BRIGADE AND THE WEST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT

assailants a lyddite shell, one of the last fired, burst in front of him, and in the smoke of it he disappeared.

A few seconds had sufficed to sway the scales of victory. The great charge swept on with irresistible speed and weight. The small kopje was submerged beneath the wave, the two trenches behind it were captured, and the whole nek was in our hands. A few Boers were taken, fewer bayoneted; the rest fled wildly in all directions.

But the tide had not yet spent its terrible force. Galled by a heavy fire from the top of Terrace Hill, the South Lancashires swung to their left and dashed upwards. At the same moment the West Yorkshires and the rest of Kitchener's fighting-line crowned the summit of Railway Hill, and Norcott, seeing that the crisis of the fight had come, let loose the Rifle Brigade and the East Surreys. The artillery had now ceased, masked by the advance of the infantry, who themselves did not wait to fire. Only on the left, where the men in the Langewachte schanzes raked the fliers with a long cross-fire, and on the highest crests, where the Boers still fought stubbornly, could be heard the jarring din of musketry. But the air was stirred by a sound that seemed to dominate all others—the fierce shout of the British soldier, as after long endeavour he rushes upon a wavering foe. Across the whole of that wide front of battle the wild volume of sound went rolling up to the defenders, heralding, as it were, the approach of the flashing bayonets below. The effect of that overpowering onset cannot be told in detail. Suffice it that the Rifle Brigade followed the line of Hart's attack, that the East Surreys bent further to the right, between the Riflemen and the South Lancashires, who struck the corner of the great summit trench, and that by five o'clock Terrace Hill was flooded by a triumphant soldiery, just as the right of Kitchener's men, after clearing Railway Hill, opened a heavy fire on the enemy flying down its northern slopes. The rays of a glorious sunset smote across that well-won field, on which the barrier that had four times proved insurmountable had been finally broken. Over all the ridges the bayonets glittered in the light, while lower down, showing black against the golden slopes, the regular lines of the supporting troops marched to the various points which had to be guarded

against a counter-attack. In the front firing still continued, as the Boers in the kloof west of Terrace Hill and north of Pieter's Hill and Pieter's station fought sullenly to cover their retreat, or even, as happened on the right opposite Barton, endeavoured to take up fresh positions. On the southern bank the artillery were again in action, throwing their shell over the captured positions into the hollows beyond. Darkness fell before the sounds of battle died away, and late into the night the flashes of Boer guns to east, north, and west showed that the enemy still had power to sting. Indeed when General Barton, about the time of the capture of the western hill, pushed the Scots Fusiliers forward to seize the last of the knolls on Pieter's plateau, the battalion found it occupied by the enemy and suffered a bloody repulse, losing ten officers and 100 men. So bold was the enemy's demeanour opposite his right that General Buller expected a counter-attack from that direction, and warned the Naval Battery on Monte Christo to be ready,[1] nor would he allow the cavalry to cross the river after the battle, fearing lest they should lose heavily in horses. Indeed, as he admitted afterwards, he did not realise how complete the defeat of the enemy had been. Though elated by the victory, few dared to hope that Ladysmith would be relieved without further fighting. Even next morning, when at 8 a.m. the General sent off his despatch, the remaining Boers were visible under Isimbulwana, and he appears to have expected a vigorous resistance at this last point. But the completeness of the victory was already evident. The Boers in front of Barton had gone, and his men occupied the position which they had failed to take on the preceding evening without firing a shot. No sniper harassed the British outposts, no invisible gun threw shell amongst the bivouacs. A little later, when the cavalry rode northwards to reconnoitre, three miles were covered before they met with opposition, and even then no serious effort was made to stop them. Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry came into collision with Boers west of Pieter's station, but these were driven back by the horse battery, and the slow, cautious advance was continued. Parties of the enemy and waggons were visible throughout the day round the base of Isimbulwana covering

[1] Winston Churchill, p. 445.

the withdrawal of the great guns on the summit. Gradually, however, the patrols pushed on, and towards evening Major Gough, with two squadrons of Imperial Light Horse and Natal Carbineers, found himself within sight of Cæsar's camp. The scouts reported the ground in front clear; so, sending back word to Dundonald, he pushed on towards Ladysmith. His commander galloped forward to join him, and by fast riding reached the outermost picquet line of the garrison just as night fell. Pale, emaciated men ran out of the scrub to meet him, and a feeble cheer told that their sufferings, so nobly borne, were over at last.

The infantry rested for a day in the positions they had won, but on March 1st they advanced and bivouacked round Nelthorpe station. The interest of the operations centres round the cavalry. Two of Lord Dundonald's squadrons were in Ladysmith; the rest,[1] together with Burn-Murdoch's cavalry, bivouacked round Pieter's station. Here, soon after daybreak, the *Times* correspondent from Ladysmith met the Colonel, and laid before him some important information. He announced that an effort was being made by a part of the garrison to intercept the enemy's retreat at Modder Spruit, that the Boer force on Bulwana was merely covering the withdrawal of their big gun, and that if the cavalry of the Relief Column would push on past Farquhar's Farm they would have "no difficulty in cutting off at least a portion of the Boer rearguard." The country was favourable to cavalry manœuvres. Riding on, he met General Buller, who was still uncertain whether Bulwana was in the hands of the enemy. As they watched, a helio-mirror on its summit signalled that the Imperial Light Horse had occupied the mountain. Judging from the correspondent's account, this must have been about 9 a.m., *i.e.*, the time when the General sent off his despatch announcing Dundonald's entry into the town, and adding, "The country between me and Ladysmith is reported clear of the enemy." It was therefore clear to him that the siege was finally raised; it was practically certain that the enemy were in full retreat. Yet the very

[1] Viz., South African Light Horse, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and probably Bethune's as well. They must have numbered some 700 rifles. Burn-Murdoch's three regiments may have been about 900 strong.

reasonable suggestion of the correspondent, a thought, indeed, that must have been foremost in the mind of every soldier who knew the situation, was not acted upon. No attempt was made to press the enemy's rearguard, or, supposing that General Buller expected a serious resistance north of the town, to observe his dispositions. One of the first principles of war was thus disregarded, nor as yet is any adequate reason forthcoming. It is scarcely possible that the horses were exhausted, for on the 27th they had comparatively little to do, and on the 28th the advance, though continuous, had been slow. Certainly their exertions cannot be compared with those of Lord Dundonald in the advance to Potgieter's or of General

SOUTH AFRICAN LIGHT HORSE PASSING THROUGH LADYSMITH

French in the march to Kimberley; and until their inability to proceed is clearly demonstrated, it will not be easy to believe that a rapid march of fifteen miles was beyond their powers. What their actual measure of success would have been no one, of course, can say. Probably General Buller did not consider the effort worth the risk. The opinion of some of those near him, and many in Ladysmith, was very different. That there were grounds for this view will appear from the brief account of Colonel Knox's pursuit, given below. As to the general question, it appears incontestable that the cavalry should have been sent to follow up, watch, and harass a beaten and disordered enemy. Nobody will

contend that this is an easy task, especially in these days of magazine rifles. But the attempt should certainly have been made, and in the hands of so clear-sighted and vigorous a leader as Lord Dundonald there was good reason to anticipate success.

While some of the cavalry were performing the necessary duty of reconnoitring south of Ladysmith, and clearing the roads for the transport of supplies to the starving population, the column despatched by Sir George White in pursuit of the enemy left the town. Unavailing as that last splendid act of vigour was, a reference must be made to it here, for it constituted the final stage in the operations which completed the relief. Owing to the physical exhaustion of his remaining effectives, both men and animals, General White had been unable to second General Buller's attempts until the arrival of Dundonald and the removal of the Boers from Bulwana on the night of the 28th made it clear that the enemy were really in retreat. But he had made inquiries as to the number of men who could march five miles and fight, and on the morning of the 1st the following troops marched in the direction of Pepworth Hill over ground they had not traversed since the evening of Mournful Monday: Two squadrons of cavalry furnished by the 19th Hussars and 5th Lancers, each about sixty strong; detachments of infantry, each about 250 strong, furnished by the Rifles, Gordons, Manchesters, Liverpools, and Devons; two batteries of artillery—53rd and 67th—horsed by drafts from several other batteries. These 1,500 were the only men fit to march out of what four months earlier had been a splendid force of about 12,000 troops.

They started at dawn and occupied a position in front of Limit Hill, the artillery opening fire on bodies of the enemy[1] scattered on Pepworth and behind Farquhar's Farm. Very slowly, for the men were terribly faint and weak, the infantry struggled forward, and it was after midday when Pepworth Hill was occupied. The Boers were now visible

[1] See "With the Boer Forces," p. 270. The author appears to be referring to this rearguard action, though his description does not tally with that given in the text, and which we owe to Mr. Churchill's account and that of the *Standard* correspondent. There is, however, no reason to doubt his statement that the Irish-American contingent, under Blake, seventy-five strong, played a useful part in delaying Knox's advance.

loading trains at Modder Spruit, and the 53rd Battery, under Major Blewitt, had just got within shelling distance when the last of three trains steamed over the bridge.[1] Almost immediately afterwards it was blown up, and the men charged with the work mounted the train, which disappeared in the hills. Still harassed by a dropping musketry, one of the last bullets of which struck Colonel Pickwood in the thigh, the force returned to Ladysmith utterly worn out. About a dozen casualties had occurred, and several horses had fallen dead from exhaustion.

In view of the lateness of the hour at which the last Boer trains started northwards there is good reason to think that had General Buller

GENERAL BULLER ENTERING LADYSMITH

given the cavalry orders either at dawn or at 9 a.m. to press on and do all the mischief they could, the enemy's loss of stores, and probably of men as well, would have considerably increased. The route through Ladysmith to Modder Spruit is from twelve to fifteen miles, and the first half of that distance was clear of the enemy. The arrival of 1,000 horsemen with the R.H.A. Battery and the Colt guns would certainly have accelerated the Boer retreat.

General Buller paid a visit to Ladysmith during the day, returning to Nelthorpe to sleep. In a despatch sent off at 5.20 p.m. he mentioned

[1] At 1 p.m. (despatch from Ladysmith, March 2nd, 6.30 p.m.)

the Boer rearguard "north of Surprise Hill," but evidently regarded it as a force too small to pursue with any hope of substantial success. In another message (dated from Ladysmith, March 2nd, 6.30 p.m.) he refers to the defeat of the Boers, which "is more complete than I had dared to anticipate," the whole district to the top of Van Reenen being clear of them. He goes on to say that their waggons were packed six days earlier, and that there was therefore no chance of intercepting them. This is no doubt perfectly true, but after Joubert's retreat with the main body there still remained some guns

GENERAL BULLER CALLING FOR THREE CHEERS FOR THE INHABITANTS OF LADYSMITH

as well as Botha's own baggage. It was these which would not improbably have been intercepted by a more vigorous pursuit.

Of the losses suffered by the enemy in the recent fighting the Boer bulletins give very scanty details. In Hart's repulse they were reported in one place to have lost nine killed and fourteen wounded, in another forty wounded. Both these figures are probably understatements. In the last fight at Pieter's nearly one hundred dead were found in the trenches, including more than one woman. One girl, aged nineteen, died in our hands. She had been kept in the trenches on account of her good shooting. Sixty-seven prisoners, some of them

MEETING OF GENERALS BULLER AND WHITE IN LADYSMITH

wounded, were taken, and probably a large number were carried off. Our shell fire was responsible for most of the damage. Two Maxims were taken, one of which had been buried.

In the horribly filthy camps round Ladysmith "vast quantities of ammunition of all sorts, herds, grass, camp and individual necessaries" were left behind. All the big guns had been carried off into the recesses of the Biggarsberg, or to Glencoe, where Joubert's headquarters were for a time established.

The enemy having disappeared, General Buller bent all his energies on the rapid transport of supplies, and so good were the arrangements that on March 2nd, at 8 a.m., seventy-three waggons, eleven of them carrying hospital stores, were entering the town. In connection with this admirable performance the General especially mentioned the names of Major Morgan and Lieut.-Colonel Stanley. Immediate steps were taken for the removal of sick and wounded from the pestiferous atmosphere of Ladysmith; most of the garrison were sent southwards to recruit, and the troops of the Relief Column took up positions to north, west, and east of the town. Here for some weeks they rested, while Lord Roberts poured his troops, into Bloemfontein and northwards upon Brandfort.

So ended the history of the Ladysmith Relief Column. Later on we shall endeavour briefly to sketch the history of that remarkable siege, and generally to summarise the result of those efforts which, through dreadful hardships and discouraging defeats, preserved the town in British hands and ultimately decided the fate of the war in Natal.

The relief marked the turn of the tide. Reverses were yet to occur, blunders were still to be made, but from the date of the raising of the siege the Boer cause grew more and more hopeless. The advance of Lord Roberts swept on with irresistible power upon Pretoria; the enemy loosened their grip on Natal, and the whole fabric of their defence crumbled before the increasing and exhaustless vigour of their mighty antagonist.

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